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THE KING'S MAIL.

THE KING'S MAIL.

BY

HENRY HOLL.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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THE KING'S MAIL.

CHAPTER I.

THE "WHITE HORSE."

It was scarcely daylight when the maltster's cart rattled into Haslemere. His horse was blown, and the hot breath, puffing through his dilated nostrils steamed in the frosty air, as he stood panting after his swift running.

John Bushell kept a good horse, and was a careful driver. He was always on the road, and with a brisk business to his back, never let "the grass grow under his feet," as he said. But though he went a smart pace, his horse had a light cart to draw, and with plenty of corn to eat, and a warm stable to rest in, John's horse had a good place of it after all, and made it a point of honour not to let any other horse pass him on the road. They had often tried it, but Dobbin would switch his tail, and, with a proud

toss of his head, try paces with them. *He* was not to be passed though he passed others, and very quickly let them find it out as the wheels spun round, and left them behind him to think better of it another time. But for this once he was blown, there was no mistake about it; and had the miller's horse come up then, there might have been a chance for him. John came from Liphook at a splitting pace, tearing along the road as though his very life depended on his speed; and when his chaise-cart rattled up to the "White Horse," the landlady was hardly dressed, so she put her head over the window-curtain to see who it was.

Now John Bushell was a bachelor, and a responsible bachelor too. His malt-house was his own; he had a snug farm as well; so altogether John was not to be despised; and Mrs. Parkes, though a widow, held the "White Horse" well in hand, and kept it going as briskly as need be. She was a fresh-coloured, good-tempered, good-humoured widow of about five and thirty, with a capital eye to business; a little petted and spoiled, perhaps—but that was no fault of hers—by all the middle-aged, well-to-do bachelors ten miles round, for Widow Parkes was a well-understood fact, and as good an investment as a man could

desire. The "White Horse" was her own out and out, and a capital property it was, with good comings in, and no children to "take the gilt off the gingerbread," as the maltster said.

Mrs. Parkes put her head over the window-blind, and as quickly drew it back; there was a stray cracker yet to be taken out, and it would not do to let John see such things before his time. Some one was with him in the cart; so whilst she twisted her curl round her finger, she drew the curtain back a little with the other hand, and saw an old, dirty-looking man shivering by the maltster's side, and his horse steaming in the road.

"Who can John have got with him?" thought Mrs. Parkes, as she let the curtain go again, and adjusted her shining curl in her looking-glass. "He looks like an old Jew, and I hate a Jew." But Jew or no Jew, Mrs. Parkes wondered what John could want, driving down the street in that tremendous way.

She turned to take another peep at the curl, which did not want any looking at at all, and could not help thinking she had never seen herself to more advantage. She threw the window open, gave her dress a finishing shake, then went down to welcome John Bushell.

He was standing with his back to the fire, while shivering in a corner sat the old Jew, tugging first with one hand, then the other, at the hair under his chin.

Something unusual had happened; *that* she saw at a glance, for neighbours and labouring men were standing in a group at the door, and she nearly tumbled over the pail Nan, the servant-maid, had left half-way down the stairs; and there the careless hussy stood, gossiping in the midst of the men outside the door.

"Mercy on us, John!" cried Mrs. Parkes,—after she had started Nan to her work again,—
"what is the matter with you all? Is the King dead, or the Queen brought to bed of twins?"

"Oh! it's nothing for these times, missus," said John, "nothing but what we might expect, though it's bad enough for all that, when honest men can't go on their way without being robbed and beaten to death."

"Beaten!" cried Mrs. Parkes,—eyeing the maltster from head to foot,—
"you're not beaten, nor likely to be, John, I should think. None about here would try it on a man of your inches, I take it."

"Oh! it's not me, missus," said John, swaying

his well-knit person before the fire. "But haven't you heard the news, then, Mrs. Parkes?"

"The pope isn't coming, is he, to frighten us out of our wits, and turn me out of the 'White Horse'? News! What news?"

"Why, the mail was stopped last night on Hind Head Heath, that's all," said Bushell, with solemn earnestness.

"The mail stopped!"

"And the guard knocked on the head by a mounted flashman. It's a mercy he was not killed, with such a gash as he's got on his skull; you might lay your finger in it almost."

"How can you talk in that horrid way, John, and I just out of my bed? The mail stopped!"

"And robbed," said the maltster. "Robbed and plundered—mail-bags stolen; and it's a lucky job there was nothing else to carry off, or they'd have had it. Stopped, I tell you, by half-a-dozen fellows, who pounced out on it by the 'Bowl,' and carried off all they could lay their thievish hands on."

Here the Jew groaned, tugged at the hair under his chin, and sat rocking himself over the fire.

"They'll rob the 'White Horse' next, and we shall all be murdered in our beds! Here,

ostler—Jem!” cried Mrs. Parkes, “fit a new flint to the blunderbuss, and put a double charge in it. If they *do* come, they shan’t come for nothing, I can tell them.”

“No fear of you, widow,” said John Bushell, “but there is for travellers over that heath; and now they have come to robbing the new mail, there’ll be no safety for any one. They were disappointed in their booty though, that’s one comfort; there was no bullion this time. The money coach went down the night before, escorted by a party of dragoons; and, strange to say, the thieves didn’t touch any of the passengers, only this one.” Here John pointed to the Jew, who had left off pulling at his beard, and now sat rubbing and looking at his torn hands. His clothes were muddy, and he appeared like a dirty bundle of rags, as he sat huddled in the corner, shaking his head, and looking ruefully, yet savagely, out of his small gray eyes.

“That’s better than I thought,” said the landlady, “and the men must have had some Christian feeling in them after all. For my part, if they had left the mail alone, I’d have forgiven them robbing a Jew of his old clothes bag.”

Isaacs sat groaning still; he seemed stunned and stupid, and had never opened his lips since

he came into the house, but let John Bushell tell the tale for him.

"Old clothes, Mrs. Parkes! Thousands of pounds, so he says, at least as good; and a mortgage on the squire's land, with bills and papers, and the deuce knows what, he brought to sell him up with. All gone at a jump, and the old man can't wag a finger without them. If it had been only old clothes now, the Jew could get another bag full, and no great harm done."

"Not half so bad as I expected," insisted Mrs. Parkes, with all a woman's pertinacity; "and if the guard's head wasn't broken, and the letter-bags were safe, I shouldn't care a crooked sixpence for the other things. Bills and mortgages indeed! Pretty bills they must be, passing through a dirty pair of hands like that! And as to mortgages, we don't want no Jew in these parts, I can tell him. The squire, bad as he is, is better than an old clothesman after all; and who knows but this nasty-looking one may have made him what he is?"

The Jew was silent still; but he raised his eyes, and there was a savage, killing look about them, as he turned his sallow face towards the buxom widow's red and white.

“ May be, or may not be, widow. That’s no reason why men are to be beaten on the king’s highway, and have their goods stolen from them, and their lives put in jeopardy by a set of prowling rascals, who spring out of a hedge, and knock a man on the head before he’s aware of it. And a precious knock the guard’s got, I can tell you ; but he’s after them though, so are a dozen others, fast as their horses can tear along. Three of them I could swear to—three flashy fellows I met yesterday, about this time in the morning, on the road to Liphook, and a good stare I had at them too ; they seemed to know it, and did not over like it, I could see. But there were *four* of them, the guard says, two behind and two before, armed to the teeth, and he swears he saw one of them fall over his horse when he fired. But he got knocked on the head for his pains, and when he came to a bit they were all gone.”

“ Gone, indeed, and vhot am I to do ?” said the Jew, speaking for the first time. “ Now they have robbed me of my papers, stolen them away from a poor old man. Mr. Martin can laugh at me now—that is, if he only finds it out.” He was afraid of saying more, and almost thought he had said too much already ; so he huddled him-

self up again, and sat thinking over the fire what to do.

"If they are on the road to London, missus, they'll be had for all the start they've got. They'll follow on fresh horses and come up to them in the long run, or my name ain't John Bushell. So after all you see, Moses, you may get your papers back again."

The Jew's eyes twinkled with sudden joy at the thought, as stretching out his meagre hands to Bushell he said, "Ride them to death, kill a dozen horses, hunt 'em up and hang 'em for the thieves they are, and I'll give something to the men—that is, as much as I can afford, if they'll only bring me my bag. I'll swear to von of them—von of them I knows, and it's not the fust time the thief has cheated me. I felt his hand upon my throat, at least I think it vos, though I *do* know some von else that's very like him in the dark." Relapsing again into his former silence Isaacs drew his scrubby eyebrows down, and sat biting his nails in the chimney corner.

They left him for a while and went into the landlady's little room behind the bar, where John told the widow how he had found the old man raving up and down Liphook, storming and cursing, and swearing to be revenged on guard and

coachman too for what had come to pass. He had been badly knocked about and nearly tumbled down the "Bowl," where they found him kicking and holding on to a stout branch that had saved him from a broken neck. Robbed he was to a dead certainty, and of more valuables, said John, than he chose to own to. But he had fought and struggled like a wild cat with his assailant, biting and scratching with all his might and main until lifted off his legs by another of the gang and pitched head foremost to the very edge of the steep gorge; and when the coach was ready to start again and he was helped into it he shrieked and howled, and called a heavy vengeance down on those who had robbed and beaten him.

The coach went on to Liphook, and when the news spread round the landlord stood aghast, and blessed his lucky stars the three men had not stayed as he had wished them at the "Bell." They would have stripped the feathers out of his beds, and cut his throat afterwards.

The landlord and ostler could swear to them, to three of them at least, and to the thick-set man with the heavy riding whip in particular. There was no doubt about him, and the ostler said "he could pick their 'osses out from a stable full, espe-

cially the strong 'oss, as belonged to the thick-set man."

But how about the fourth? *He* had not been at the "Bell," and where had he sprung from?

Helpless and impotent in his rage the Jew went up and down, yelling out his curses and tearing at his hair. They wanted him to go to bed. "He would be sure to sleep, the beds were so soft," said the landlord. He would not, but in the midst of early stirrers in the inn-yard kept walking up and down, asking how far it was to the squire's house. Worn out at last he went into the stables, where he sat upon a heap of straw until the town's people were astir—John Bushell among the rest,—all startled by the news of the overnight's mishap, and the stoppage of the mail on Hind Head Heath. So to help the old man on his way, and hoping to be the first in with the news at Haslemere, John had his horse put to, and drove the Jew along the road, almost as mad as he was, to think of the bad times he lived in, when mounted highwaymen rode about the country in a troop in open daylight, only to pounce the more securely on their prey at night. "He'd lend a helping hand to catch them at all events," and so drove his horse on at an unusual speed, and clattered up to the door of the

“White Horse” before the landlady was fairly dressed, or had taken out her last curl.

“He’s better now, missus,” said John; “but he’ll soon break out again in the old place, and where’s the wonder after all if the old man does gnash his teeth and swear a bit? Suppose they had burnt my malt-house, or the ‘White Horse’ had come to harm, we shouldn’t like it, should we? And shouldn’t *we* stamp and swear—at least *I* should, Mrs. Parkes; and you would *think* round oaths if you didn’t say ’em, shouldn’t you, missus?”

“Perhaps I should, John. But then you know we are Christians, and earn our money in an honest way. But he’s a Jew, and gets it by any dirty means he can. Nothing’s too bad for the likes o’ him, for I hate a Jew from the bottom of my heart.”

“There’s no love lost between us I take it on that score, missus,” replied the maltster as he drank his early flip, which the careful landlady had brewed for him with her own fair hands “to keep the cold out of his stomach,” as the widow said. “But Jew or Christian,” resumed the maltster, “are much alike if you come to have a clean loss like this; so I drove the old man over to help him on his way, and a pretty pace I came

at. Dobbin has not had so hard a run since I bought him three years ago. I thought you'd like to hear the news, Mrs. Parkes, so I thought I'd see if I couldn't be the first at the 'White Horse' to tell it you. So now you know the truth."

John could not help looking at the landlady as he spoke, and felt he had done the right thing after all.

The landlady did know the truth, and liked John none the worse for it, rather better perhaps. But that was a secret, and the only means of guessing it was by the smile she gave him when she said, "John must want his breakfast." So Nan was told to leave her pail and broil some ham, and poach a dozen new laid eggs for Master Bushell's breakfast.

"But the Jew, missus, what's to become of him? *He* won't eat ham, you know."

"I'd be sorry to trust it near him! Ham indeed! It's too good for the likes of him. One of my own curing, too, and mellow as a pear. He shan't set his ugly teeth in it if I know it."

There was little fear of that, for when they went into the parlour again the Jew was no longer there. He had risen from the chimney corner as soon as Bushell and the landlady had turned their

backs, and asking some one at the inn-door the way to Chase House, had shuffled off, biting his nails, and moaning as he went along the road. Dobbin was in the stable, there was no occasion to be in a hurry, so the widow and the maltster sat down to breakfast in the parlour, and never once thought of the Jew shambling on his way, or the stoppage of the mail on Hind Head Heath.

“ Well, this *is* ham,” said Bushell, as the widow helped him to a fresh slice ; “ melts in the mouth without the trouble of biting it. It’s of no use, but there are no hams worth talking of after yours, Mrs. Parkes.”

“ Try another egg, John.”

John did, and another after that, and again John thought there were no eggs like the eggs at the “ White Horse.”

“ Your hens have a knack of their own, missus,” said Bushell, swallowing a whole egg at a mouthful ; or else it’s the looks of *you* as does them good, and makes ’em lay such white and yellow. (Red and white would have been the better simile the widow thought, but she knew John meant it though he did not say it.) “ There never were such eggs. My cocks and hens are fools to yours.”

The secret was coming out, though John never

once thought of it. If ~~he~~ had only Mrs. Parkes to look after his hens and sit with him at breakfast, who knows but his eggs might have the same flavour as the eggs at the "White Horse?" And as to the ham, the hogs were of the same breed, it was cured from the same receipt as John's. But that didn't matter. There was a better relish about that ham, he thought, than any ham he had ever tasted in all his life before.

Could it be that Mrs. Parkes imparted this mysterious virtue to the ham and eggs? One thing was quite certain—the flip she made was unlike any other flip John had ever drunk; as different from the flip at the "Hind Head" as chalk from cheese. He had a great mind to try if he could not secure this wondrous woman as a mistress for the malthouse and farm, only he did not quite know how to set about it—when Mrs. Parkes, to coax his appetite, asked him to have "another slice."

"Can't be done, widow. I have eaten twice as much as I should eat at home. Twice! ah! three times as much, and left off with an appetite. Yet, for all that, if it was *you*, widow, instead of the ham, I should be tempted to try again."

"La! Mr. Bushell, how you do talk!" simpered Mrs. Parkes.

“No more than I mean,” said John. “Them ham and eggs have put strange notions in my head,”—he forgot the flip—“and I can’t help thinking, Mrs. Parkes, that ham and eggs up at the farm would taste different if you was there to look after them. And Dobbin, too—he’d go twice as fast, I take it, though he’s not a bad ’un now to go, as the miller knows. He’s tried him often enough. But if ham and eggs get on this way, why not Dobbin?”

The widow felt what was coming, and reckoned on it as a dead certainty. Mr. Parkes had begun just in the same way, and never stopped till he had popped the question.

“There is no knowing, John,” said the widow, with a killing look at Bushell out of the corner of her eyes; “though, to confess, I know more about hogs than ’osses.”

“You’re perfect there, widow—perfect as an angel!” Mrs. Parkes’ red and white blushed unmistakably. Blushed like a peony! “You handle them like no other woman I ever heerd on. And as to ’osses, look how you have managed the White ’un ever since Mr. Par——”

This was unlucky of John. For the widow began to look serious when she thought of her husband, as most women do. John tried to

wriggle out of the scrape in the best way he could, but it "knocked him all of a heap," as he afterwards said.

He took another draught of the flip, and then went on again.

"The White Horse runs upon four legs now, widow, ever since it came to you by——"

He stopped, with his mouth wide open. He was on dangerous ground again. The widow evidently thought so too, but said nothing to help him out of it.

"Four legs, and all strong ones," continued John, determined not to be put off what he had to say. "Why, all the county families knows you as well as I do, and likes you, though perhaps not so well as I do."

John hung fire again, while the widow played with the strings of her apron. She knew what it must end in, and, like a prudent woman—for once—held her tongue.

"But how should they, widow?" said John, with a resolution that did him honour. "How should they? They have never tasted your ham and eggs; never sat, as I do now, and eaten twice as much as when I'm by myself. And so, Mrs. Parkes, suppose—suppose we try if Dobbin will carry double?"

“La! Mr. Bushell! what *do* you mean?” cried Mrs. Parkes, in pretty wonderment.

She knew what he meant well enough; but John must speak plainer now, or not at all.

“Mean? Why, that I don’t intend to break-fast by myself any more, if I can help it; so, if you’ll only say the word——”

“Word? What word?” cried Mrs. Parkes, with a slight flutter, and the gentlest of all possible smiles.

“‘Yes!’ of course,” said the maltster, “and the matter’s settled. John Bushell is a man of his word; and when he asks you to say ‘Yes,’ he doesn’t want you to say ‘No!’ I mean it. And if it’s all the same to you, we’ll be married at once—by licence, Mrs. Parkes. The malt-house can pay for it.”

Of course Mrs. Parkes said “Yes,” and of course John Bushell said he was a “happy man—the happiest of men for aught he knew;” and of course he gave the widow a kiss—which Nan vowed she heard even in the kitchen, and told the barmaid of it. Nancy knew the sound too well to be mistaken. She knew it as well as she did the ring of a sixpence—perhaps better; she had a larger experience of the one than the other, for Jim Ostler was an “oudacious

feller, and would have a kiss, whether she liked or no."

Nan's instincts—or her ears—were right. John Bushell *had* kissed the widow; and, that day week, the name of "Jane Parkes, Widow," was painted out from the sign-board, and, where it had stood, a man had just written, in fine red letters, "The White Horse, kept by John Bushell, Farmer and Maltster."

CHAPTER II.

THE "KING'S ARMS."

It was yet early morning when the quiet town of Godalming was startled by a clattering of horses hoofs, as three horsemen made their way along the ill-paved High Street. One of the riders could hardly keep his saddle, but leaning over the neck of his horse, swayed helplessly about, while his companions on either side held him up, and kept him from falling. They walked their horses at a slow pace—the man groaning at every step they took, and calling fretfully and impatiently for brandy, until they halted at last at the "King's Arms."

There was nothing very unusual in the noise they made, knocking and shouting at the inn door. They had come with an express, perhaps, from Portsmouth, and wanted fresh horses to take them on to London. They knew they were always kept ready saddled at the post-houses on the road, and a man had little else to do than get out of one saddle and so into another, to

resume his journey. Expresses were constantly passing between London and Portsmouth—when men rode post, carrying despatches or letters almost every day. The "Angel" at Guildford, and the "King's Arms" at Godalming, had fresh relays of horses to suit all comers. The "Angel" had its twenty pair, and the "King's Arms" almost as many, while the innkeepers on the road kept everything in readiness for a sudden mount, and ostlers were always on the alert in case of need.

But this time the men knocked and shouted louder than usual, while at every pause there came a groan from the wounded man. Again and again they knocked; but over all the din was heard a cry of agony—a painful aching groan!

The sleeping ostler still snored on in the distant stable, while Baxter, dismounting from his horse, beat with his heavy whip at the doors, and cursed him to his heart's content. There was a shuffling sound at last, a light gleamed over the yard gates, and a voice within cried, "Coming!"

"Coming! and be hanged to you for a lazy whelp! keeping people in the streets, whilst you are snoring in your straw!" cried Baxter, as the ostler drew the bolts and threw open the gates;

“here, take my horse, and give him a loaf sopped in a pint of ale.”

“All right, master!” said the ostler, holding his lantern up and looking at the three new comers who had broken so unpleasantly on his night’s rest. “Hallo! what’s up now? have you got a dead man with you?” cried he, staring in alarm at the wounded Garroway.

“No more dead than you are. A little brandy will set him all right. We have been attacked on ‘Hind Head’ by highwaymen, and one of them fired at us. But he got little by it, I can tell you.”

“This one seems to have got something, though,” said the ostler, “and more than I should like to carry. Stopped by highwaymen, do you say? They must have been pretty bold ones to try it on with three of you at once. I hope they didn’t stop the mail as well—it only went through four hours ago.”

“Oh! the mail’s all right; I only wish my companion was [as well off. How do you feel now, Mike?”

Mike could not speak; he could only groan, and almost fainted when they tried to shift him from his saddle.

“His arm’s broken, master, and he looks

dreadful bad," said the ostler, holding his lantern up to Garroway's pale face; "mercy on us, he does look bad, indeed! half dead from loss of blood. Lay him on this straw whilst I wake master. Stopped on 'Hind Head,' and shot at like so many rabbits! I wish all the footpads in England were hung off-hand, and their gibbets set up in a row—that's what I do, for my part."

Here Mike groaned again, and at length fainted in their arms as they lifted him from his horse, and placed him on the straw. The frightened ostler rang at the landlord's bell, to get the wounded man some brandy, whilst Baxter knelt by his companion's side, feeling his pulse, at the same time speaking in earnest whispers to Bridgeman.

"What's to be done with him?" said the latter; "and how are we to get on?"

"Wait a bit," replied Baxter. "Do you mind him whilst I look to the horses. We may want them soon enough, perhaps."

"Confound that punch!" half muttered Bridgeman, as he took Baxter's place beside the wounded man, whilst the other busied himself with the horses. "If it had not been for that, I should be well out of this scrape, and poor Mike, too! If ever I touch punch again, may I——"

Whatever virtuous resolution Bridgeman had determined on, and by what saintly oath he was about to record it, cannot be determined. The appearance of the landlord, who had been summoned out of the house by the ostler's ringing, cut short his mental reservation.

Mike lay fainting still. His shattered arm hung dangling by his side, while the red drops fell trickling from it on the ground. The brandy was soon brought, and pouring some of it down his throat, they rubbed his brow, and tried to place his arm more easily—suspending it round his neck by a handkerchief, until other and better help could be procured.

“Give him more brandy—dose him with it, and put fresh life in him—to make up for the blood he has lost,” cried Baxter. “We must get him on his horse again. If he die on the road, go he must.”

“Go?” cried the landlord, with a start. “He'll not go far in the state he is in, or I'm mistaken. He wants a surgeon, not a horse.”

“May be,” said Baxter, as he rubbed his beast down, and gave it the bread and ale the ostler had brought. “We must get on for all that, and can't leave him behind.”

“I wash my hands of it,” said the landlord,

which, by the way, would have been attended by no great trouble to him, considering his usual habit. "Why, there is no more beat in his pulse than there is in a child's; and if he die upon the road——"

"Oh! he's not one of your dying sort," replied Baxter, cutting the landlord short. "There is plenty of steel in him to keep him going." But as he looked towards the deathlike face and blood-shot eyes of poor Mike Garroway, he seemed to think the landlord was perhaps right after all, and that he *would* die on the road, if they tried to move him in the state he was. His arm was broken, shattered, and torn to pieces, by the discharge from the guard's blunderbuss; and Baxter saw at a glance it would be impossible to sit him on a horse and keep him there. He would only faint away again; and what should he do with him then? He knew they must push on to escape the hue and cry that was sure to follow, the moment the stoppage of the mail had spread abroad. And yet to leave him—leave him to be taken! Baxter felt it was a coward's part, and one he did not like to play. But what was he to do? He tried again to comfort Mike and cheer him up, but to no use. There was a deadly leaden look about his face, and his listless

eyes were almost closed as he laid in a half stupor on the straw.

“Couldn’t we get a chaise to drive him in?” inquired Baxter of the landlord.

“Not at the ‘King’s Arms.’ I don’t want to be tried for manslaughter; and to move him now would be little short of murder,” ejaculated the landlord, in unmistakable alarm.

“We must get on without him then,” whispered Bridgeman to his thick-set friend, “or we shall be in the boot as well. There is no use staying here to be trapped like a couple of stray pigeons, and have our necks twisted for our pains.”

Baxter still looked at the wounded Garroway, undecided what to do. They had come out together, and he, for one, was not the man to leave a friend in the lurch. But Bridgeman had his bridle in his hand, and with one foot in the stirrup, was ready for a start, looking pale and anxious; while, moaning on the bloody straw, lay poor Mike, his fine red coat soiled and dabbled, and his face white—ay, whiter than the worked frill of his embroidered shirt! His waistcoat was unbuttoned, his neckcloth thrown off, while the attentive landlord wetted his pale lips with brandy every now and then, or bathed his forehead with it, to keep him from fainting away again.

The ostler's lantern, standing on the ground, threw out a paler light than when they first came in. The dark night was tinged with the faint gray of morning; and when the daylight came, Baxter knew as well as anyone they ought to be miles away—long miles, if they wished to save their necks. Bridgeman evidently wanted to save his, by his nervous fidgeting and constant listening to the least noise in the street, towards which he bent his ears in trembling alarm.

There came a sound at last, though distant—a far-off unmistakable tramp of horses. Bridgeman listened for a minute, then turned white and cold as marble. Baxter heard the trampling too; but he only fixed his eyes on Garroway, and the more he looked the more he became convinced there was no help for him. He would have stayed and fought by him, if fighting could have done it, and never left him, dead or alive, while he could do him good; but what chance had one man against fifty? "Time was up," he said. The luck had been against them, and things must take their chance.

Without a word, he swung himself into his saddle, and calling the ostler to him, put a guinea into his hand, "to pay charges," as he said. "And hark'ee," he whispered, "keep an eye to

him when we are gone ; and if you'll only put him in a snug corner, out of harm's way, and get his limb properly doctored, I'll make that guinea a hundred ! Don't stare, man. I say I will, as truly as I sit here, if you'll only do what I want. You understand—you and the doctor—no one else."

There was no time for more, for the ring of horses' hoofs came down the streets, and the hum of voices, as of shouting men, riding through the town. Baxter looked again ; and as he heard the noise, felt half inclined to take Garroway up before him, and chance the rest ; but the pursuit came nearer still, and Bridgeman, he could see, thought only of himself. Grasping his riding-whip in his strong hand, he turned his horse's head, and, following Bridgeman, rode into the street.

But as they left the yard, there was a sudden cry within, while Garroway tried to call them back, and urged them to take him with them ; he tried to raise himself, but the pain the motion caused him, made him shriek, and fall back exhausted on his straw. Baxter heard the cry, but he did not look again. He knew it was useless now ; his pursuers were close at hand, and he must save himself.

The moment Baxter and his friend turned

into the streets there was a sudden shout from the pursuing men, who lashed their horses on in hopes of overtaking them. It was enough for Bridgeman; he whipped his beast with nervous fear, and at the utmost speed of his jaded horse, tore madly down the road, leaving his friend to follow as he could. But Baxter took his time, and with his strong horse well in hand, kept it at a smart gallop, tempting his pursuers on, in hopes of riding him down. He had no fear of that. He knew his horse, and when to try its speed. He turned and looked behind him every now and then, to see how close they were upon him, but that was all. His horse was fresh, while theirs were blown. The ale had filled its veins with fire, and Baxter had to rein and hold it in with all his strength, to prevent it bolting. There would have been little chance for them if it had; but Bridgeman was before him on the road, and he must give him time to get a-head, or there was no hope for him.

There were a dozen men at least scouring after him, and a man, mounted on a swift horse, with a handkerchief tied round his head, led them on. There was light enough to see his bound-up head, and his red coat too, as the guard spurred on, eager to catch the man who

had dealt him a blow of which he bore the bloody witness on his head, while the others strained their horses on, shouting and hallooing to the passers by, to stop the flying man, as a dozen voices cried "Highwayman!" and "Stop, thief!" Galloping on the road, they followed close after Baxter, who kept upon his way undaunted and unruffled, as though he had been joining in the chase, instead of flying from it. Yet still the cry went on from mouth to mouth, while on the road leading to Guildford, Baxter and the men who hunted him sped along.

There were not more than a hundred yards between them; but that distance was never lessened, though they tried hard to do so; for Baxter kept a watchful eye behind, determined to bide his time, as he rode on fearlessly and at his ease.

Some workmen tried to stop him, as his pursuers shouted out "Highwayman!" and "Stop, thief!" but his heavy riding-whip swung round his head, and they fell back again. There was a desperate though calm look in his dark eye, and his arm seemed strong enough to kill a bullock with a single blow of his loaded whip. "They did not like the looks of him," they said, and let him pass.

Hallooing and shouting still, they clattered after him, and whipped their foaming horses on, spurring them to their utmost speed, but to no use. The highwayman still kept the hundred yards between them, without the aid of spur or whip, waiting till the time should come to use them both. That time would come, he knew; and when it came, he knew how to ply them without mercy.

They were at Guildford now, and swerving his strong horse over the bridge spanning the Wey, he rode up the steep hill on which the town is built. It was market day, and carts and men went lumbering up the hill; or standing by the sides of the High Street graziers and farmers stood gossiping and chaffering over their expected sales. He would be closed in here, they thought, as with fresh cries his pursuers followed after, rattling up Guildford Hill. Baxter saw the danger, and braved it manfully. But as he rode along he saw Bridgeman flogging his jaded horse only a short distance ahead of him!

There was little chance for him, he knew, if he kept the same road. The men would ride him down before he got another mile. His horse was dead beat, and could not hold out long against the fresh ones they could send after him. He

would save him if he could, and therefore rode on gently until he got almost to the top of the hill, when suddenly there was a cry below, and every voice in Guildford seemed to take it up, and the hill to echo it back again—"Stop the highwayman! a thief! a thief!" was shouted far and near; and before he well knew where he was a group of farmers and market men ranged themselves across the road, and blocked his way, flourishing their whips and sticks, shouting and yelling back the cry! The horses were close upon him. In another instant he would be taken and if taken, hung. Turning his horse sharply round, he faced his pursuers, then slashing at its flanks drove him with a sudden bound into the midst of the astonished riders. Swinging his heavy whip he darted clean through them, striking down those who tried to catch at his reins, or attempted to hold him back.

The time had come to try his horse's speed, and if he dropped dead, do it he must.

The movement was so sudden, and the dash he made at his pursuers so unexpected, three of the men were unseated, and before the rest could turn their horses round to follow, Baxter was dashing down Guildford Hill again.

The hunt now became general, as a dozen fresh

horsemen leaped to their saddles, and joining in the cry of "Stop thief!" went tearing down the hill fast as their nags could carry them.

Men, horses, dogs, all followed in pursuit, as Baxter fled before them, striking right and left with his loaded whip. Still they dashed madly after him, each taking up the cry, while eager heads stared out of windows, watching the chase and shouting "Thief!" and "Highwayman!" too.

There was yet a way to stop him, and at the lower end of the street a market cart, with its team, was wheeled across the road to block his passage. Baxter only laughed at this, drove his horse at it, and with a slash of his whip, mounted it over the horse's back, and cleared it at a bound. There was a louder shout than ever now, while crowding after came his fresh and old pursuers, the guard still heading them, and mounted on a horse almost as fleet as Baxter's.

He crossed the bridge, then leaving the Portsmouth road to the left, rode at headlong speed straight up the steep ascent of the old Southampton road.

Now, for the first time, he put spurs to his horse, and bounding up that terrible hill, his strong beast sped upon its way, the guard and his com-

panions clattering and shouting far behind, their blown horses struggling and panting up the rough uneven road, while his went on as on a level plain, dashing the fire from loosened flints, pounding with its iron hoofs the chalky soil, and flinging it in the air behind him.

He was on the Hog's Back now, and looking round Baxter beheld his pursuers climbing up the brow of the steep beyond, while he was far away upon the road, and mounted on a horse they had no hope of catching, nor would he give them one. Spurring on, he shot along that high set ridge, and there behind him saw the town of Guildford, with its old castle rising on the other side the intervening valley. The country lay beneath, spread out like a map, as the land fell off from that high ground, sloping miles and miles away on either side. He could see the broken ridge of Hind Head, and in the distance, the stretched out Blackdown Hill. There on the left lay Godalming, and he shuddered when he thought of poor Mike and his broken arm, and wondered if he would be taken after all. Bridgeman he knew was safe—that was one comfort. So he urged his flying horse to desperate strides along the high Hog's Back.

The guard was the first to gain the brow of

the steep ascent, but Baxter was more than a mile ahead already. There he was in the distance waving his hat, setting miles and miles between them, while his horse bounded and tore along, as though it could never tire.

They gave up the chase at last, and walked their horses back again, down the flinty and uneven road.

The highwayman had escaped, but he was only one, out of a gang of four, who had robbed the mail on Hind Head. Two of them had ridden out of the "King's Arms." The thick-set man they had kept in sight, but his companion galloped off at such desperate speed there was no chance of catching him. Yet the other one was before them, the guard knew him at a glance. He was the man who had struck him, and eager to be revenged he kept his eyes only on Baxter, when, if they had known the condition of Bridgeman's horse, and had followed on the London road another mile, he must have fallen into their hands. Baxter knew this well enough, and full of trust in his good beast, and confident in his own daring, had turned on his pursuers, and so baulked their scent of Bridgeman, as they followed after him and let his companion escape.

Meanwhile Bridgeman's horse came to a stand still on the other side the town, and for all his flogging would not move another yard. Trembling with fear, he led it into a neighbouring thicket, where he skulked till night, and then made his way through unfrequented lanes to London.

The guard and his companions rode back, and as their tired horses clattered up old Guildford Hill again, their riders cursed the highwayman and his horse too, for leading them such a dance, and all to no use. He had escaped, and the next best thing to do was to look after the other three, who they hoped might yet be taken.

Old Lawyer Clam lay on his sick bed at the inn, and when the noise came by, he inquired of the waiter what had happened. He hoped the rascals would be hung, he said—hung, drawn, and quartered—and he live to see the sight. For his part he hated such vermin, fellows who lived upon the property of others, and grew fat by cheating.

He shuddered at the thought, and praised his lucky stars he had been taken ill upon the road, and not able to go on by the mail. He might have been murdered for aught he knew. But

Isaacs had gone by it, and what had become of him ?

The lawyer was sick and ill, yet he never closed his eyes that live-long day, thinking of the old Jew, and wondering if his bag was safe.

CHAPTER III.

“ THIS DAY WEEK.”

THE “ Hind Head ” did a good stroke of business that day. The settle was filled with sightseers from places round about, and the landlord had to tap another barrel of his home-brewed, to supply the wants of his numerous and unexpected customers. A murder or a robbery was always a good thing for the “ Hind Head ;” and if a mail could only be stopped once a week, the landlord felt he should soon be able to give over drawing ale, and take to a farm of his own. The home-brewed was unexceptionable, the barrel the best tap of the year ; and while the news—like the ale—was fresh, the “ Hind Head ” had a busy time of it.

The tidings spread to Chase House and the Hall as well, not a cottager but had heard of it ; and men and women were on their way to get a sight of where the mail had been stopped, trooping along the road, when they met an old dirty-looking Jew shuffling along, asking for the

squire's house. What could an old Jew like that want with the squire? That was no business of theirs, so they pointed out the way he was to take, and followed theirs to the “Hind Head.”

Meanwhile old Isaacs plodded on, muttering to himself, and thinking what to do. Had Clam been there to help him, he could have managed well enough he thought; but he had been seized with one of his old fits when the mail reached Guildford, and had to be carried to bed shivering with a fit of ague.

“I vish the old thief may die in it!” muttered the Jew to himself, throwing his arms about, and speaking with savage energy, though in so low a tone of voice that had old Clam been listening in the hedge, he could not have heard a word he said. “I vish the old thief may die in it—die! and chatter the false teeth out of his head he is so fond of grinning with. Vy must he have a fit now? Vy, indeed, but only to spite and cheat me if he could. He vanted the mortgage out of me, and tried to vheedle me out of it. Nothing but vheedle all the vay—and he knows how to vheedle as vell as any von I knows on;—only I vasn't to be done, but sat upon the bag for fear he'd steal it. Vot are his bills to me? Paper—

bits of paper! and for vat I knows a lot of forgeries like Master Nic's."

Here he appeared to swell and burst with rage when he thought of Upton, and cried, "Oh! that vagabond, that infernal traitor of a thief! but I'll be down on him yet, there's plenty of time—plenty!" The old Jew changed his tone again as other recollections came upon him, and grinding his teeth, said, "And then to lose it after all, and have my hands cut and my clothes torn! Two of us might have managed. Old Clam could bite and scratch if he could do nothing else; I knows he can scratch vell enough vith a *penknife*, and alter figures sometimes; and very vell they looks too. Oh! very vell; but they von't cheat me though they have others; and now *his* papers are gone as vell! Sarve him right; they vere all to come in a lump, as he said, and smash Mr. Martin up, ven ve could share and share alike. Oh, oh! very like it, vasn't it? My mortgage vas as good as ready money; but his bills *might* have been looked at, and they *might* have found out something if he'd gone to law upon them. But then he is *so* fond of me, he says, and so am I of him—very! and I vish he may die full length in his bed! I should make something out of it—a

good deal out of it; and I vish he may die—die in the middle of the night, vith no von by to hear vot he says.”

He had talked himself out of breath, walking and talking at the same time, and stopped to rest a little; then went on again, slowly at first, and biting the torn skin from his grazed hands.

The road was very rough, and the deep cart-ruts in the broken ground made him pick his way along the moist and sticky clay. Yet still he saw no signs of the squire’s house; so up the hilly lane he went, shambling along the rough and stony road.

At length he spoke again, muttering to himself, and speaking through his half-closed lips. “Ven I gets there, vot am I to do? He’s very green, and p’raps von’t ask to see the papers; but if he does, vot am I to do then? Svear I vos robbed of the copy, and that the real deed was left at home. That’s good; there’s nothing like a little thinking ven a man’s in a mess. But if he von’t believe me, and vonts to see them—vot then? He knows I came on purpose, as I told him I would; and now the devils have robbed me of it—robbed and plundered me of every scrap! I vonder vho did it? I should like to know; and I think I could lay my finger

on a likely boy to do it—two of 'em if it comes to that. I must keep my eyes awake, and find it out if I can; and the best way to do it is to be civil—very civil—till I have got all I want, and then hang him for a thief and robber as he is. Nic's fair game enough; he is a scamp—everybody knows that; but the other von's a gentleman—a landed squire—although a *leetle* shaky, and von as has done a queer thing or two before to-day. But who'd take my word for it? who'd take the word of an old Jew, who's got a game of his own to play, unless I had the proof in my hands. No, no, those thieves of lawyers knows too much about me, and I can't afford to run no risks. I must dodge about, and find it out in the best way I can. A little vheedling after old Clam's fashion, and a little money may do it."

The thought of money calmed him down a bit, and he went slowly on, so as to give him time to lay his plans. "If I could only prove he had a hand in it, I might frighten him out of the estate without the papers, and make him shake in his shoes like a Newgate felon, unless he preferred dancing in the air at Tyburn in a pair of silk stockings. But Nic's the more likely von; he was seen in town last week, and is up to anything desperate—anything to fill his

pockets, and would murder me, if only to get rid of my evidence against him about the bills and the money he svindled me of. It must be Nic, or some of his crew; and now I have got a scent of him, I'll ferret him out of his hole like a starved rat! But if the other sets me at defiance, vot am I to do then, ven I have nothing to show for it, nothing to go to law upon? It's too clear a piece of svindle not to be found out by those cross-questioning lawyer thieves as you can't answer, and vho von't believe you even if you svear it. That von't do for me, I can't bear to be cross-questioned, so I must coax him up a bit; and if he'll only sign fresh papers, I'll let him have another thousand pounds to pay vot old Clam can make him pay. I should have it all to myself then—all to myself, and old Clam could not cheat me. It's only vaiting six months, and I could make a clear sweep of it, and have a better time of the year to make my money out of the land in.”

He came at last to the lodge, and entered through the swinging gate.

He had walked a few yards when a dog rushed out at him, barking and showing his teeth. The Jew showed *his* teeth as well, and tried to frighten him away; but the dog stood in

his path, barking and growling with all his might. Isaacs, although half afraid, tried to coax him with one hand, while he stooped and picked a heavy flint up with the other; but the dog seemed to know his purpose, and flying at his legs, kept dodging first on one side, then the other. At last the stone was thrown, and the poor brute went limping and howling off, barking and howling by turns; while the Jew shook his fist at him, and said, "The next time he came that way he'd bring a something nice for him to eat—a beautiful piece of meat, with plenty of arsenic on it; and he would sit upon the gate and see him eat it, and then throw stones at him, pelt him, and stamp upon him as he lay and died." "I owe you a good turn," said the Jew, "and I'll pay you von of these days, or my name's not Isaacs."

He came at last to the court-yard of Chase House, and ringing at the gate, asked to see the squire.

Elakeborough was within expecting him, and had been all the morning. It was this day the Jew had threatened to turn him out of his estate, and that he would come he knew. He had heard of him already when Lucas came into the room a few minutes before, with his mouth wide open,

to tell him the news that had just come in from Liphook, of the robbery of the mail on Hind Head eath.

"The mail, man?" said Martin; "you are dreaming!"

"Never half so wide awake," replied Lucas; "though it's a wonder how I keep my eyes open at all, lying awake at nights as I do; and last night of all nights, I had horrid dreams, and thought I was fighting with Mr. Baxter, sir—fighting on the green, sir, and he beat me with his big fists, and knocked the breath out of me; and when I woke I found the cat sitting on the top of me, twisted up like a ball. But I soon knocked *him* down, though I could not Mr. Baxter."

"Get breakfast, and let's have no more dreaming now," said Blakeborough, with a gesture of impatience.

"It may be a dream, sir, but it seemed as true as that I once lived under-footman to the Duke of——"

"Breakfast! and no more words."

"The whole place is full of it, sir," persisted Lucas. "The mail was stopped last night on Hind Head by four rascals, armed to the teeth with swords and pistols, and it's a wonder the guard wasn't killed outright, but he fired his

blunderbuss, and knocked one of the highwaymen over. Mail bags stolen, passengers beaten, and an old Jew half murdered, and robbed of a bag of gold and jewels."

"Oh! if that's all, he can afford it, I dare say," replied his master, with a careless air. "I don't much care about the Jew. But the wounded man——"

"Will come to the gallows, I hope. They are after him, a dozen horsemen at least, and the guard as well, mounted on the miller's horse. They'll catch them before they get to Guildford, as sure as I once lived under——"

Blakeborough turned slightly pale, then moving towards the window, looked from it for a while without making a reply.

Lucas was not to be put off in that way. He had a tale to tell, and tell it he would.

"A dozen men, sir, armed with sticks to knock them on the head when they come up to them. They'll have a hundred to join them on the road, and if they only catch them——"

Still Blakeborough made no reply, but stood looking out of the window.

"There'll be more gibbets to set up," continued Lucas, "and a good job too. Three of the fellows stopped at the 'Bell' all day yester-

day. Three evil-looking scoundrels, one of them dressed in a red coat, with a fine frill to his shirt.”

Blakeborough knew what Lucas meant, and whom he was talking of, although he did not dare to allude more directly to his master’s friend.

Speaking at last with as much indifference as he could assume, he said, “Some worn out soldier, I suppose, who wanted to pay himself, now the government has turned him off.”

“Not he,” said Lucas; “London scamps, all three of them, one a thick-set, brawny man, with a heavy riding-whip. The ostler can swear to the horse and rider too, if that’s all. It was him as knocked the guard on the head.”

“Oh! they’ll catch him,” said Blakeborough, carelessly, then added, almost to himself, “if they can.”

“Catch him, sir? no fear of that, sir; and if they’ll only handcuff him, and tie his legs together, I should like to have my fight out with him, now I am wide awake.”

“What! horse and all?” said Blakeborough, with a slight laugh. “But have done with this nonsense, and let me have breakfast. I went to bed early last night; I intend to keep early hours for the future, and have had a long walk this morning.”

Blakeborough had only just returned, as Lucas knew. He had gone to bed earlier than usual, so had all the household, and soon after daylight had started out to walk and get an appetite, as he said, for breakfast.

And when Lucas took the breakfast up, his master ate with a keen relish, while his man kept fidgeting about the room, with a restless and uneasy air. There was something he wished to say if he had only dared, but Blakeborough ate on, and did not even notice him.

There was something in the squire's look he did not quite like, and Lucas felt if he were once roused he would throw him out of the window without a second thought. Lucas knew this well enough, and keeping as closely to his subject as he dared, spoke of the overnight's robbery and the three men who had stayed at Liphook.

Lucas was puzzled; he had drawn comparisons as closely as he durst, with the evident intention of convincing his master he had a guess of something not very agreeable to him, and which he might think it worth his while to induce him to conceal; but Blakeborough took no notice of his hints, or turned them off to indifferent subjects.

Lucas was determined to venture again, and he did.

“They’ll be tried at Guildford, wont they, sir?” asked Lucas, placing a fresh plate upon the table.

“Yes, if they take them.”

“Do they hang ’em there, sir?”

“Why do you want to know?” inquired his master.

“I should like to see ’em hung, sir. The thick-set fellow at least, and the scamp in the red coat. I should know him a mile off.”

“Whom do you mean?” said Blakeborough, with a slight change of colour.

“The men who are to be hung, sir—that is, *three* of them. But there was a fourth, they say, I wonder where he came from?”

“From the clouds, I should think,” said Blakeborough, with a frown.

Lucas had gone far enough. He had given a hint, and if his master chose to take it he could, if not he must be uncommonly dull, he thought, duller than *he* was, at all events.

He would have returned to the charge, and pressed the squire closer still, but a stormy look had come over his master’s brow, which he did not care to stand the bursting of. He wanted to satisfy his curiosity for all that; the description

of the three men was an exact counterpart of the squire's visitors, whom he heard go creaking down the stairs, when he was half asleep. He could see his way clearly enough to *them*, but how about the fourth man? The squire had gone to bed early, he had not heard *him* go down the stairs, nor his horse go out of the stable, although he had lain awake half the night, and to his certain knowledge the squire's horses were safe in their stalls in the morning. Lucas had satisfied himself of that, and everything was as it should be; everything except the state of his mind. He had been in a state of positive excitement ever since the news came in of the robbery. There had been strange company at Chase House lately, and Lucas had come to think he shouldn't be surprised if he had to wait upon Jack Ketch himself. He had no wish to meet that public functionary under any circumstances, and if he came, he thought he was likely to have all the house to himself, unless he chose to drive a bargain, and make it worth his while to keep a quiet tongue in his head, and not be too familiar with himself or the squire's friends, before his time.

The description of the three highwaymen had a strange effect on Lucas. He could not get them out of his head, and the under-footman to a

Duke had had a hard fight trying to persuade his second self, that a footman out of livery to a country squire, although he met with bad company now and then, was better off, as the head of an establishment, with Sally for his undivided share of the spoil of the kitchen, than an under-footman to a peer, snubbed by all the household, and kept at arm's length by his superiors in office. There were strong arguments on both sides, until at last the under-footman strengthened his position by the startling fact—which he had hitherto kept a profound secret in his own bosom—that having once been discovered with more silver spoons in his possession than he could satisfactorily account for, he had been questioned in a manner no footman, with any sense of his own dignity, could submit to, and in a state of extreme disgust had left his place without even giving notice or waiting for his wages; while a country squire's simple gentleman was out of harm's way, and could see a moderate independence in perspective, if things went on as they had done much longer.

There was no resisting such weighty arguments; and subduing himself to the pressure of circumstances, Lucas gave up the point, and determined to remain where he was, and not give

notice, as he had half resolved upon, when he found his character likely to suffer by contagion.

Fortified with this strong determination, and finding all his hints thrown away, he removed the breakfast with his usual quiet dignity, and went into the kitchen to seek consolation from the tender-hearted Sally.

Left to himself, Blakeborough sat with a restless and uneasy air. His face was haggard, while his eyes wandered from side to side, then fixed themselves at last in a vacant stare before him. At times they glanced towards the door with a nervous and impatient gaze, as he sat listening to the least sound that reached him from below.

He rose and looked again out at the window, straining his eyes towards the cross road, along which he thought the Jew would come. "‘This day week,’" half murmured Blakeborough to himself, "he said he'd come. I wish he would, and have done with it, and not keep me in a fever expecting him. Perhaps," and a half smile curled the corners of his mouth, "perhaps he has thought better of it, and is not so anxious now to sell me up. But whether he come or not, he'll not have the game all his own way, that's one comfort. He'll find two can play at it as well as one."

He was silent again, although he still looked slantways from the window, and never took his eyes from the direction of the cross road that led up to the gate. What was that coming along the winding path? Was it the figure of a man? or had he conjured up the form of one, straining his eyes so long? Between the trunks of the old trees something moved; and in the wider space that now occurred, he saw the Jew shambling along towards Chase House.

He moved on tiptoe to the room door, and listened. The Jew was asking for him; and his horrible nasal tone and husky voice made him sick, when he thought what he had come for. The Jew was speaking low and earnestly—Lucas was talking to him. So he rang the bell, and told him to show old Isaacs up, then seated himself with as much indifference as he could assume, nerving himself for the scene he knew must come.

Lucas walked side by side with Isaacs up that wide oak staircase; and as they went along the Jew whispered in his ear, "If you finds the man I vonts—you know who I means—I'll make it vorth your vhile, young man; and if you have a secret, or anything else you vonts to sell, I'll give you a good price for it, and put it out of the vay for you, you understand."

Lucas did understand, and thought of the spoons! Old Isaacs was a man worth knowing, and could do him a good turn. It might be in his power to do the Jew a good turn too, more especially if he were well paid for it.

There was no time for more, they were on the landing; and opening the room door, old Isaacs went in.

Lucas shut the door, and walked away, thinking to slip back when they were in the thick of their conversation. If he could not join in it he knew he was a good listener, and that was something. He was half-way down the passage when Blakeborough called to him, and told him to leave the door open—wide open, for the room was hot.

His master was sitting opposite it, and there was evidently no hope for him unless he bored a hole through the ceiling. Something must be done for the future, and Lucas resolved to find some means or other by which he could pursue his quiet studies without fear of interruption for the time to come.

CHAPTER IV.

CAUGHT IN A TRAP.

THE Jew walked into the room, bowing and cringing, and "hoped Mr. Martin vos vell."

"Oh, yes, I am well enough," said Blakeborough, "though not so well pleased as I could wish, to see you here. But where's old Clam? I thought he was coming with you—to breakfast?"

"Vell, I can't say vere he is, exactly," replied the Jew; "Clam's an odd man, and a bad von to deal vith; so I thought I'd come by myself, and try and make things pleasant, you know."

"You look as if you would," said Blakeborough, with a sneer; "I know your pleasant ways, of old."

"Now don't be always making game of a feller ven he vonts to do you a good turn, if he can. You knows how you put me out the last time, and made me say vot I vouldn't, if you had not druv me to it. You knows how to get over me vell enough, ven you likes; and you knows you

can do it too, though you can't vith Clam. The more you vheedles, the vorse he gets."

"Why, Clam and you——"

"Oh, I knows vot you means; ve are old friends, so ve are; and I vish to treat him as a friend, if I can. But I don't like his vays, for all that, 'cos he never knows ven he's had enough out of a man, never! He'd squeeze him like a lemon, shake the last drop out of him, and then he'd vant the peel as vell."

"Oh, I see," said Blakeborough, "you'd stop short of the rind! Then it was Clam who sent you down to sell me up, was it?"

"He wanted me," said Isaacs, "and tried hard and fast to make me do it, and called names ven I said you vos a gentleman, and not a thief, like Nic Upton, who'd cheat a man, and knock him on the head if he could only get a chance of putting him out of the vay. A gentleman like you couldn't do it, I said. *You* wouldn't rob and strangle a man, vould you, squire?"

He put the question carelessly enough; but he fixed his sharp cunning eyes on Blakeborough, as if he would have pierced him through and through.

Martin did not even wince. He looked Isaacs in the face as though the question had had no

deeper meaning than the words seem to convey, and answered quietly—

“What! Upton has been at his old tricks again, and tried to borrow money of you, has he?”

“Not he, the thief! He knows better nor to show his face in daylight. But at night I wouldn’t answer for any man, would you, squire, especially with a mask on.” And again he looked at Blakeborough, who shrugged his shoulders as though he did not understand him.

There was a pausing, doubting expression about the Jew’s face; but the more he turned his cunning eyes on Blakeborough, he grew more puzzled and uncertain what to do. There was no fretful passion now for him to take advantage of, no suing, no petitioning for time; he could have met that well enough, and done, as he had done a thousand times before—storm, threaten, bully, and seize on every chance the indiscretion of his victim might give to him to sink him deeper and deeper still in doubt and misery.

Blakeborough was as calm and cold as stone; Isaacs had bad cards in his hand this time, and did not know how to make a single trick.

“You don’t seem much surprised, Mr. Martin,” said the Jew, “to see me here.”

"No; I expected you."

"Oh! you did, did you?"

"Yes, you said you'd come to-day; and old Clam told me you were a man of your word."

"Old Clam's an old thief, and doesn't know vot he talks on," cried Isaacs, rather savagely, when he thought how the lawyer had left him to do all the work by himself, and how, if he had been with him the night before, he might have saved his bag of papers. "He's always having fits, and not to be trusted. I vish I'd never trusted him, nor seen him, if it comes to that, for he always tries to cheat and vheedle me ven I've done all the vork. *You* vishes you hadn't seen him, too, by this time, I dare say, don't you, Mr. Martin?"

"I should have been all the richer if I had not seen him or you either," rejoined the squire, with perfect calmness.

"But *vy me?* ven you sees vot a friend I vonts to be to you, if you'll only give me good securities, and pay me proper interest."

"Not another penny do I intend to borrow or pay again for 'interest,' as you call it. I have been fleeced enough already, and have made up my mind to have done with it, and stand by the worst as it is."

“Vy do you talk in such a dreadful vay, ven you sees I don’t vont to be hard upon you—quite the contrary?” whined old Isaacs.

“I tell you I don’t care how hard you are, so long as the matter is settled and done with. I’d rather live in the worst cottage on my place, than pass the life I have done these three years past between you and old Clam, each playing me into the other’s hands until you almost drove me wild. I have had enough of it; the last business has sobered me; and, as I said before, I am come to think calmly of it, and can look the worst in the face better than I could a week ago. I would almost have gone upon my knees to you then, and begged for time; but you refused me—swore you would sell me up; so do it, and make an end of it.”

“If you vish it, sartinly; there’s no difficulty about that.”

But there *was* a difficulty, and the Jew knew it, though he tried to carry it off with a high hand, and not let the squire know how powerless he was for all his boasting.

“Oh! ve’ll do it for you,” said Isaacs, “fast enough—sell you up in no time, and turn you out by the shoulders. I came vithout Clam on purpose to do you a good turn; but if you vont

have it, vy, more fool you. I'll take possession of the place at vonce, in right of my mortgage. So pack up your traps, and off vith you."

"Not quite so fast as all that comes to," said Blakeborough, carelessly. "When I found you would have your pound of flesh, I asked—not that I liked it, but I did it for all that, for anything was better than remaining in your power—I asked my neighbour Dormer, up at the Hall yonder, to pay your mortgage off, and stand in your shoes, until I could shift myself a bit; and I have agreed to pay interest at five per cent upon the money."

"At vot? Five per shent! Vy, the man's mad, and ought to be put in Bedlam for wanting to ruin a poor old Jew out and out, who does his best to turn an honest penny ven he can. Five per shent! The thing's not possible. It's only a flam to try and swindle me out of my rights."

"Five per cent, and not a penny more. So out with your papers, and let us go to him at once."

Blakeborough rose, as if to put his design into execution, while the Jew turned the colour of lead, and sat motionless in his chair, with a vacant chapfallen look. He worked his hands, and pulled his crisped and grizzly hair, but never

spoke a word. He felt he was caught in a trap he could not get out of. Yet, hoping Blakeborough knew nothing of the papers being lost, he tried to work himself out of his dilemma by saying, though his voice was slightly tremulous—

“Give him my mortgage! Oh, oh! a pretty joke that would be. Old Clam would like to have it, too. Curse him and his fits as vell! My mortgage! Vot, and take it to him at vonce, I suppose? Oh, oh! as if I vos such a fool as to bring the parchments vith me vhen the copy would do just as vell. Not a bit of it if I knows it.”

“What, in the devil’s name, then, brought you here?” cried Blakeborough, with a touch of his old fire in his words. “What do you come sneaking and trespassing on my land for? You were going to sell me up all in a hurry, you and your sharking companion, old lawyer Clam; and now I can pay you what I fairly owe you, and not a shilling more, unless the law makes me, for I’ll fight you point by point, and make you prove your debts—if you can. So now you know what you have to expect.”

Isaacs felt the ground slipping from under his feet. He tried to storm and bully, but Martin only laughed at him—scoffed and jeered at him,

till the old man grew white with rage, and yelled his horrid curses out, swearing he would hang him up on the same gibbet with his friend Nic Upton if he tried to cheat and swindle him.

"You think I can't do it, but I vill!" roared Isaacs. "Clam and I vill find a vay, only you see if ve don't, that's all."

"This is fine talking, you old rogue of a Jew, and frightened me once; but you've tried it too often, and it won't do now. I have a friend to help me, and the law to back me, with plenty of money to pay costs; and once again I say, what I owe you on the mortgage I'll pay, money down, but not a farthing more. So all you have to do is to transfer your deed and take the cash."

There was no help for it. Blakeborough held the winning card, and the Jew felt he must lose the game if he went on much longer. His papers were gone, and the only chance he had was by a little management, until he could get him in his power again, when he thought how he would make him smart for what he was now doing. This was all clear enough to Isaacs, who left off storming, and tried (as he had determined on upon the road) to wheedle and coax Blakeborough into his clutch again.

He thought he'd try it now.

“It’s all’ays the vay vith you, Mr. Martin, and all’ays vos. You never gives a man a fair vord, but svears and frightens me out of my vits. Vot’s the use of svearing in that dreadful vay? But you all’ays does it vhen you sees me put out, and it makes me narvous. You knows how I has to fight for you vith old Clam, vho vont leave you a dry rag to stand in, if you don’t mind vot you’re about. Now, I tell you vot I’ll do. I doesn’t vant to get nothing out of you, mind that—it’s for your sake, not mine, I does it. I tell you vot I’ll do. I’ll lend you a thousand pounds, at proper interest, of coorse; or as much more than a thousand as you vonts to pay old Clam’s bills vith. I’ll put you up the right vay to do it, as a friend; and ve can draw a fresh mortgage on your estate for vot you’ll owe me, all in a lump.”

“I tell you I’ll not sign another inch of parchment to save you or old Clam from the gallows—if anything *could* save you from it. And if you have only come to threaten me, I’ll turn the hounds out, and hunt you like vermin off the place. So away with you at once, and don’t stand whining and fawning there, as you used to do, till you could turn and snarl at me, and tear me in pieces between you. I’ll not give you the chance again; so leave off grinning and showing

your teeth, like an old ape as you are, and come to what you have to do at once. The mortgage I'll pay, though I had only half the money it is drawn for ; but as for your bills for interest, and interest again on that, I'll not pay you a penny, so don't expect it. And what's more, if you don't like it, try what the Court of King's Bench will do for you. It wont be the first time your ugly face has been hooted out of court."

"Vot! vont you pay me my bills?" Isaacs stammered. "All properly drawn and accepted for only as much as vould pay me every time you dishonoured them? You're a pretty squire, ain't you, to try to cheat a poor old man like me?"

"I tell you what it is," said Blakeborough, with cool determination, "if you try any more of your insolence on me I'll pitch you out of the window, and let old Clam bring an action against me for your broken neck. So now you know what you have to expect."

This threat had no effect upon the Jew. The loss of his money had greater terrors for him than a fall from the window. He stood gnashing his teeth and throwing his arms wildly about, crying or rather yelling out, "Thief! damn'd thief and cheat! do you think you are going to rob me in this vay? You vants to come

Nic Upton over me, do you? And now you have robbed me, vants to break my neck! I vish yours vas in a halter, and they wanted a hangman to vait on you I'd do it myself, I vould, as true as I lives by bread."

"Hang! you'd hang a dozen men, you old rascal—hang 'em like dogs if you had your own way; guilty or innocent, it would be all one to you, if you could only make it worth your while."

"I vish I had the chance, that's all, on the feller as tried to throttle me last night out on the Heath there, after he had stolen my deeds—the copies of 'em I mean—the copies as I am a live man! Clam's got the others safe enough, and before you are a veek older——"

"Ay, ay, '*this day week*' I suppose," interrupted Blakeborough; "and now off with you, or I'll be as good as my word."

"And I'll be as good as mine, if I sells every stick I have to do it vith. I'll let you see vot I can do vhen my blood's up—I'll let you see." And Isaacs, by way of proving how savage he could be when he liked, began to gnash his teeth, and snarl, and growl like a mad dog, at Blakeborough, who lost all command over his temper, as, seizing him by the collar of his greasy coat, he dragged him to the head of the staircase, and

pushing him forward as he fought and struggled in his grip, sent him sprawling to the bottom.

Lucas was at that moment creeping up the stairs with a view of improving his studies, and was nearly tumbled backward by the falling Jew, who clung to the balustrades, vowing to hang the squire for trying to murder him. This was no place for Lucas. He saw the glaring look of his master's eyes, so he slunk away, and peeped out of a sly corner at what was going on with a startled and bewildered air.

Blakeborough's passions were now fairly roused, and once roused they must take their course. He knew how much he had suffered through the bullying yet half-frightened Jew he saw crouching before him, and felt he could have throttled him as he stood half-whining, yet half-bullying still at the bottom of the staircase.

Fearing his excited passions might lead him into some act of violence fatal to his shrinking foe, Blakeborough controlled himself by a strong effort, yet took the readiest means in his power of effecting his purpose, as he threw open the outer door and calling to a man lounging on the outside cried, "Hollo, you sleepy lout, you Jim Dedman, out with the hounds and hunt this old rascal off the place. Set them

on his heels, and never call them off till he is a mile away, do you hear?"

Dedman knew his master's temper, and without a word went to do as he was ordered.

The Jew saw there was no help for it. He heard the hounds bark and yelp as Dedman went towards the kennel, so he shook his fist at Blakeborough, and with a horrid curse ran staggering down the cross-road leading to the Lodge. He never stayed to look behind him, for he heard the hounds barking, until he had passed through the swinging gate at the Lodge, and stood panting and trembling on the outside.

After a few minutes' pause he started on his way again, and retraced his steps along the broken and uneven road that had led him to Chase House. His speculations and his dreams were over, his deep-laid schemes and hoped-for wheedling had come to nothing, while his pale, wrinkled face was distorted by a frightful look of hate and malice as he went staggering and groaning on.

He felt he was defeated, and deprived of the power of wreaking his vengeance as he would like to have done, had he only had his papers in his hand to prove his right and title, and enforce his claim on the estate. Smarting under his disappointed rage he raved at Blakeborough, then shook

his fist in grinning malice in the direction of his house. But his deeper curse was kept for Clam, who could have helped him on he thought, and have saved his bag from being stolen if he had been with him over night to help him to fight for it.

The Jew once out of sight, Blakeborough appeared to recover all his natural buoyancy of spirits. The dreaded interview was over, he had treated Isaacs as he deserved; and "this day week" no longer sounded in his ears, or haunted him in his dreams. He had time to look about for help, and relieve himself from the power of the men he dreaded most of all the millions that the earth held. He laughed and rubbed his hands when he thought how he had had his revenge upon him for all the anxious days and restless nights he had passed since he first put his name to paper in that smoky, dirty room, up two pair of stairs in the narrow court leading to the Thames.

CHAPTER V.

NEGOTIATIONS.

BLAKEBOROUGH had played for a high stake, and had won it; though, like most gamesters who play beyond their means, he had run the chance of being ruined. Had Isaacs been in a better position for enforcing his rights, or had he tested the authority on which Blakeborough acted, he would have lighted on the true position of affairs; or by going to the Hall, as Martin had suggested, he would there have ascertained how matters really stood. This he did not dare to do. The loss of his papers prevented the possibility of driving matters to the push, either in carrying out his designs on Blakeborough's estate, or of learning the truth of the squire's assumed ability to pay off his mortgage deed. Hoping to terrify the former victim of his avarice into a ready compliance with his design, and at the same time relieve himself from Clam's hold upon him, he would have lent Martin sufficient money to pay the lawyer off if he would only have consented to

sign a fresh document for the amount of the old one, and what he was willing to advance as well. He would thus have had Blakeborough at his mercy, beside making good the loss of his stolen papers. He would almost have doubled the amount of the deed he had lost by adding the fresh principal and interest to the old sum, and by holding out the temptation of renewed time, and the promise of a little ready money to go on with, he hoped to induce Martin to sign again, and so entangle him still further in the mesh he had prepared for him.

Martin played a desperate game; and the Jew for all his cunning was taken in by the very dash he had made, and trembled to try ventures with him. He knew that though he might be able to recover the amount of his lost mortgage by a process at law, he could not recover upon the usurious and fraudulent bills he held for interest. But if he could only include the sum total of these as well, in a fresh mortgage, he would not have minded a few hundred pounds to tempt Martin to sign it. But the unexpected proposal to redeem the bond, which he knew was no longer in his possession, put him at his wits end, and he fell into the trap as blindly as he had hoped Blakeborough would have done into his.

No sooner was old Isaacs fairly on his way than Blakeborough resolved to ride over to Hengist Hall, and place the state of his affairs plainly before Mr. Dormer. Had he only accepted him for his son-in-law, all would have been well enough. He could then have depended upon his assistance to relieve him from his difficulties, but he still hoped the old gentleman might be induced to help him so long as he ran no risk, and held sufficient security on the land for any advance he might make him. The bare suggestion of such assistance had frightened the Jew. It was now Martin's only hope. He felt if he were once free of Clam and Isaacs and the pressing claims that weighed upon him, he could redeem himself from his past losses by curtailing his expenses, and applying himself diligently to the culture and proper management of his estate. He was strengthened in his resolution never to bet or race again, and once freed from his incumbrances resolved to lead an altered and amended life. He would surround himself by better influences than those he had lately been associated with, and the time might come when he could retrieve his lost position in the county, and become a credit to his name and lineage as his father had been before him.

His mind was so fully occupied by hoping

thoughts and anticipations of the future, he had ridden on without observing, until close upon them, the curate and Florence Dormer, walking on before him in earnest conversation. Blakeborough raised his hat to Florence, and with a slight bend of his head to her companion went on again. Their presence brought a new train of thoughts up in his mind, and he rode on, thinking of what a hoping life she might have shed about him had she only listened to his suit, or had he known her years ago. Her gentle looks and tender conversation might have estranged him from the wild companions of his youth, and saved him from the errors of the past. A love like hers would have shed a holy influence about him, and preserved him from the contagion of bad example. But it was now too late, he had shaken hands with vice, and could never quite disown her. He tried to shake her off, but when he least thought it she was standing by his side with the familiar air of an old friend, and held her hand out to him in return. The plague spot had touched him, and could never be quite effaced.

The past had risen up before him even in the midst of his dreaming fancies, when he looked at Florence and saw the curate by her side. There was no flying from that past. He saw it in all

things, and felt its unseen presence shadowing over him in all he hoped, and dreamt, and saw.

Other thoughts came crowding on him as he rode, and gathered like a thunder cloud ready to burst upon him ; yet he went along with a defiant air resolved to brave it out, and laugh at the worst that could befall him. This was only for a time. He grew dejected, even tearful, and hoped if once that cloud should pass, the light might stream again, and his future yet be tinged with hope.

Old Mr. Dormer was busy in his library, and when the squire was ushered into his presence, he found him surrounded by old worm-eaten manuscripts and books on ancient sports, over which "with spectacles on nose" the old gentleman pondered with a bewildered look ; and aided by a glossary at his side, spelt his way at every second line, or kept turning to it for the correct meaning of some obsolete phrase, until he got so hopelessly bewildered, turning first to the one, then to the other, he forgot which was the glossary and which the book. He might have taken a readier means he knew, and one more easy to find his way through, had he chosen a less antiquated edition, and read with ease some book in modern type treating of the subject he had so much at heart. But that was contrary to

his creed, and in a matter of faith like this he would have died a martyr.

Old musty folios and quartos lay in a heap before him, while his hands and face were covered and grimed with dust, as he kept searching in their illegible pages for the particulars of Christmas sports such as our forefathers indulged in, and he was determined to try again.

Books on hunting, hawking, running at the ring, and a dozen other obsolete pastimes he had thumbed and thumbed again, hoping to light on something new—something quite unusual and out of date;—and as he read, old Paris gardens came with all its noise and shouting once again, while bulls and bears lay mangled on the ground, amid a crowd of wild gallants, citizens, and 'prentice boys. All this he sighed to think was past and done with now, and hardly a remnant of the fine old English sports remained. Nothing was as it should be, not even a game of quarter staff, or sword and buckler, could be had for love or money now, to stir a man's blood and make him bluff and sturdy as those heroes of the times gone by—the famous Robin, or those doughty wights, Adam Bell, Clym of the Clough, and William of Cloudesly.

“These were something like men,” he said;

“men worthy the age in which they lived, and would aid a distressed demoiselle, or send a cloth yard shaft up to the feathers in the breast of a marauding thief, or spoiler of the land ! But look at what they do now—look at what they did last night—a set of sneaking scoundrels, who would fly before the crossbow of an ancient yeoman ! Didn’t they stop the mail, rouse peaceful people out of their first nap, only to rob and plunder them ?”

“But, Mr. Dormer——” interposed Blakeborough.

“Don’t talk to me, squire ; I say it is what we may expect, now we have outlived the good old times, and taken up with modern innovations. Such a thing could not have happened three centuries ago. There was too much honour in the nation ; and a Knight Templar would as soon have thought of stopping a mail coach, as he would of being false to his lady’s favour. I hear the old rector means to preach a sermon on it next Sunday ; that is, if he doesn’t fall asleep in the middle of it ; and much good may it do—without offence be it spoken. Not half so much as instructing the peasantry in the adventures of Sir Bevis of Hampton, or the doughty knights of old. Only give our footpads a taste for chivalry, and I’ll engage there’ll be no more mails robbed.”

Blakeborough made no reply to this enthusiastic laudation of our ancestors, and as he did not desire to break a lance with the old gentleman on his much-loved hobby, he let him have his way without so much as questioning any of his facts: the possibility of Knights Templars stopping mail coaches, or Sir Bevis turning footpad.

But sports must be had, veritable and antique sports to do honour to the yule log and March beer—eight bushels to the barrel! There must be wild men, and morris dancers, a little early perhaps for their May-day jingling, but have them he must, with Maid Marian in the midst. All these he knew by heart, and could have led the damsel out himself, if he were only dressed in proper garments, and the weather not quite so cold, with bells and streamers, and some one to play the pipe and tabor properly to the good old English tune nobody knew now. He had tried it once, but found it such hard work (the pipe and tabor playing “God save the King” for want of a better) he was obliged to leave off, sweating at every pore, and had had a fit of rheumatism for his pains. “Another consequence,” as he said, “of modern times, when a man could not even dance a morris without being laid by the heels for it.”

Blakeborough sat looking at him with a smile,

but old Mr. Dormer had not half done yet. He had a long day's work to do, sorting ballads for the maids to sing, and searching for authorities for his Christmas games. There seemed no end to it, though he vowed he loved nothing half so much, and never grew tired of such reading as he had there; "easy enough when you know the character of old writing," as he said, "and you can make it out by little and little, not running through them as you do through modern books, which you may read right off, and be none the wiser when you've done with them. These," cried Mr. Dormer, slapping his hand upon a dingy folio, which sent a cloud of dust flying over the room, "these are something like books, a little worm-eaten and dusty perhaps, but none the worse for that; all the better in my eyes. The older they are the more dusty they get, as a matter of course."

Blakeborough quite agreed with Mr. Dormer, and professed a liking for old books himself. He had a chest full at home. He had often tried to read them, but the type was so old, the printing so faded, and the books themselves so musty, he could never get on with them. But there they were, a whole chest full, "and if Mr. Dormer would accept of them——"

"Accept them!" cried Mr. Dormer, holding

out his dirty hand, and shaking Blakeborough's with a hearty shake, "accept them! and thank you too, squire. I'll bury myself in them like a moth, and devour them twice as fast, though they're not slow about it when they make up their minds to it. And who knows but I may light upon some unknown rarity?—that is, if it is not too old to be made out—and astonish the world with some new light or other, they'll praise me to the skies for. So let us go and bring it home at once."

"I'll not trouble you to do that,—I will send it to you; and you may take my word for it, you'll find the contents old and rotten enough, time-worn and worm-eaten, to your heart's content."

"They can't be too old for me," said Mr. Dormer, with a look of mingled pride and pleasure. "I am an authority, you know, and with a book like this by my side" (he pointed to the glossary), "can make out anything. That is, I can make out as much as any one else can, and don't fear to say it, in the teeth of the most obstinate antiquary in the land. Did not I discover that Queen Elizabeth wore embroidered petticoats, and proved it incontestably by producing the garment, worked in threads of gold? A set of pig-headed fellows said it was

something else—I forget what—but a petticoat it was, I'll take my oath of it, or I never saw a petticoat before, and belonged to no less a person than the virgin queen herself. Thank you, squire, thank you again and again, for who knows but you may be the means of my being elected into all the learned societies in Europe? They have kept me out of them at present from sheer spite, I am too strong for them, and know too much, and can read black letter almost as well as I can my Bible, and spell my way through "Piers Ploughman," and old "Dan Lydgate," if need be. Not that I mean to say I understand them, but that goes for nothing. What antiquary does, I should like to know? They are fine works for all that; and if we could only understand them——"

"They are beyond me," said Blakeborough, smiling; "and no wonder—I have not the profound research of Mr. Dormer——"

"Why did not you say that a month ago, squire, and send your chest full of books at the same time? I do believe—but it's too late now—I should have chosen you for my son-in-law, in spite of all they say against you."

There was a sudden frown on Blakeborough's face, followed by as sudden a look of calm. He wished he *had* sent the chest, and thought how

much better he might have passed his time humouring his eccentric neighbour, than in herding with the companions he had done, whose very association had cost him the regard of her whose good will he now so much desired. It was a new fancy, perhaps, but new fancies had always a charm for him while they lasted, and the gloss was new. In a little time he longed for change again, and the next novelty attracted him as strongly as the first had done; but he *did* regret this chance, and regretted it more than he had dared to own. At last he said—

“The loss is mine, Mr. Dormer, and a serious loss it is to me. I say it earnestly, for I feel it so, and shall ever think that my connection with your family would have saved me from a world of care. It would have given me the aspirations I so much needed, and strengthened me in the desire I have to lead an altered life, to become an altered man.”

“Let us hope the best,” said Mr. Dormer, “let us hope the best, squire, and who knows but between us we may establish, in this part of the country at least, a new liking for old things?”

This was not exactly what Blakeborough meant; but the old gentleman was not so easily dismounted from his hobby, he must have his

ride out ; so the squire let him have it. At last he said—

“When I wrote to you from town, Mr. Dormer, I wrote seriously, hopefully, and am only sorry Miss Florence could not be induced to think better of me. That cannot be helped now, she may some day—I don’t say she will : and it is in the hope that *you* may now think better of me I have come to speak to you, come to you as to the only man I dare call a friend, to ask what, I trust, you will not refuse.”

“Anything but your chest of books back again, and—and Florence.”

“They are both your own, and hopeful studies each. I have seen Miss Dormer only twice—once here, when we were so strangely interrupted——”

“Yes, I know, I know ; I have thought of it a hundred times, that is, when I can bring myself to think of anything modern.”

“And just now, as I rode over to the Hall ; and both times Mr. Stapleton was present.”

Here Mr. Dormer began fidgeting over his books, evidently ill at ease. It was quite clear the subject was not a pleasant one.

“I only alluded to it as a strange accident,” resumed Blakeborough, willing to bring the old

gentleman back to what he had to say. "I saw Miss Florence with admiration, and Mr. Stapleton with pain. Some day I will try and bring myself to say as much to him. But this is from my purpose. I have said I regard you as a friend, the only one I have, and I have come to ask a service at your hands."

"If I can do it, squire——"

"You can, if you only will. I will ask nothing of you but what you may readily grant, or I can fairly ask. It is soon told. You have heard of course, everybody has, of certain wild doings of mine when I left college, and became associated—to my loss and shame be it spoken—with men who did me no good. There is a deep grief in my heart for this, and a dear life to answer for." His voice became slightly choked as he reached thus far, but he went on calmly and collectedly again. "I fell into debt, borrowed money from Jews and lawyers—men who robbed and plundered me. To one of these I gave a mortgage on my estate for a small sum lent, but multiplied by interest into thousands. I ask you, as a friend, to pay this mortgage off, and secure yourself, by my whole estate if you will, though the sum required is not a sixth part of what it is worth. You will relieve me, Mr. Dormer, and save me

from hopeless ruin if you will do this, and I—I shall be grateful.”

“What! one of the best estates in the county fall into the hands of a Jew money-lender, or some ill-blooded fellow, who will drive me out of my senses by making everything look pretty, as he calls it, and modern, for the sake of a few thousand pounds—properly secured by mortgage on the estate, of course. Not while there is a drop of old blood left in the land! You shall have it, squire, have it at five per cent.—not a penny more—for nothing, if it comes to that, so long as the principal is safe, you know. I’ll manage it, don’t you fear. You only bring the chest of books, and I’ll write to Pritchard to arrange what can be done. My agent in London has a few thousands to spare, I know, and you shall have them, squire, as soon as Pritchard sees his way and the law’s clear. We must have law, you know, they had it in ancient times as well as modern; so that matter’s settled, and so say no more about it. It is only neighbourly, and what I am sure our forefathers would have done, or how do you think the land has been preserved out of the hands of the Jews these last five hundred years.”

Blakeborough was earnest in his thanks, and

old Dormer careless in receiving them. The chest of musty books had opened a soft corner in his heart, and he held out a helping hand cheerfully and willingly.

It was thereupon understood that Blakeborough was to go to town, armed with a missive from the Hall, and that Mr. Pritchard was to arrange about the mortgage as he thought proper. By these means Blakeborough could discharge what old Clam and Isaacs could compel him to pay, and he cast a load of anxious care off his mind when Mr. Dormer shook him heartily by the hand, said he would write the letter, and told him above all things "to be sure and send the chest."

The squire's horse was at the door; he leaped into the saddle as though fresh elasticity had been given to his limbs, and never drew rein until he reached Chase House, where a small knot of servants were gathered in the court-yard in eager conversation. Dismounting, he threw the reins to a groom, and asked Lucas—

"What they were all crowding there for, and what they were talking of?"

"The very thing, sir, I was praying for. One of the rascals has been taken—one of the highwaymen."

Blakeborough turned white, and cold as marble. He did not speak, but stood looking at Lucas almost unconsciously.

“Taken at Godalming; a fellow with a red coat, and his arm broken: a fine flashy coat, just like Mr. Garro——”

Blakeborough heard no more; but walking heavily up the stairs to his room, threw himself into a chair, and sat staring at the wall. He was startled from his dream of hope, and saw the past rising before him, shadowing the future like a rising cloud, that shut out light, and hope, and all! The bright horizon faded from his view, and all was storm and tempest once again.

CHAPTER VI.

THE PRISONER.

MIKE Garroway had indeed been taken ! Taken in the inn yard, where he reclined upon the heap of straw, groaning and fainting still.

Disappointed in their pursuit after Baxter, the guard and his companions rode back towards Liphook, and on their way stopped at the “King’s Arms,” just as the surgeon had set and bandaged poor Mike’s broken and shattered arm.

The ostler had had no time to put him out of “harm’s way,” as Baxter had suggested. A hundred guineas were not to be had every day ; and if saving the wounded man would put him in the right way of getting them, the ostler was the man to do it ! There was now no help for it. The surgeon had done the best he could ; but the wounded man had not sufficient stamina to bear the shock his nervous system had undergone. The loss of blood, added to the agony he had endured, rendered him powerless, sick, and feeble as a child. There were no two words to be said

about it, for the guard rode into the yard, and no sooner set eyes on Mike Garroway's red coat and bound-up arm, than he at once recognized him as the man he had seen fall over the neck of his horse when he fired, on the first attack made upon the mail. He was one of the gang; he knew that well enough, and was quite resolved he should pay for his broken head.

A crowd soon collected about the gateway of the inn yard, while the news of the highwayman's being captured spread from one end of the town to the other. Men, women, children, flocked from all directions, and busy curiosity was at its height, each new comer striving to get a sight of one of the men who had stopped the mail, when an old Jew put his head into the midst of them, and asked, "Vat vas the matter?"

"The matter!" roared the guard. "You ought to know it well enough, after the fight you had last night. Don't you see what a pretty bird I have broken the wing of, and how we've run him down at last, although we couldn't the other, 'cos as how he never gave us a chance? I only wish he'd got as good a one of being hanged as this one, and I could see him dance upon nothing."

The truth of what he saw burst upon the Jew

all at once, as, forcing his way through the crowd, he shrieked out, "Vat's that he's lying on? He's got my bag of papers under him! Vy don't von on you make him get up, and not let him cheat a poor old man like me out of his property?" Then turning fiercely to the wounded man, he cried, "Get up vith you, or I'll drag you away by the heels, if you tries a dodge on me like that."

He was advancing with savage eagerness to put his threat in execution, when the guard seized him by his outstretched arms and flung him back, crying, "Hands off, Moses; don't interfere with what you've no right to. Your papers, or whatever else you had to lose, are far enough off by this time, I warrant. Gone to keep company with the mail-bags one of the fellows carried off, and hid away snug in London, long ago."

"You can make him tell me vhere they are, can't you? Pull his arm, and he'll soon out vith it. If that vont do, I'll give him ten guineas—I vill, as sure as my name is Isaacs. Ten guineas—you see how he opens his eyes at the sound of so large a sum. Perhaps I have offered too much, but I'll give it for all that; and vot's more, young man, I vont appear agin you—I sveal I vont, if you'll only tell me vhere my bag of papers is."

"No tampering with witnesses," cried the

constable, who here bustled into the inn yard with all the consequence belonging to his exalted station. "No tampering with witnesses, or I'll have you indicted for a principal after the fact, or before it, if it comes to that. The judge will call you over the coals, and pretty hot ones they'd be, I can tell you, if such high treason once reaches his ears."

But the Jew didn't care for judge or jury either, if he could only see a chance of getting his papers again; and when he was driven back by the guard, stamped and swore with rage; then danced like a delighted madman about the yard, chuckling and laughing when he thought he should be able to get his bag again; then tearing his hair and blaspheming because they would not let him drag the prisoner off the straw, and search him on the spot.

Calling again to Garroway, he shouted out, "Twenty guineas, if it comes to that; and vot's more, I'll find you a good Old Bailey lawyer for nothing. Von as doesn't mind vot he says, but 'ill bully the judge himself if he only shakes his head or finds fault vith him. A riggler out-and-outer—von as knows his vork, and does it, too, vithout a bit of pride. You only find my papers, and never mind vot they says. They only does

it to frighten you, and make you swear a false oath. So take my advice, young man; and if you *are* hung, you'll be able to dress like a gentleman with the money I'll give you, and set all the women crying mad for love of you; or, if you've got a young 'oman as you're fond on, I'll give it to her instead, to buy mourning vith."

There was a loud shout at this, while the baffled Jew went stamping with rage about the yard again, vowing vengeance on guard and constable for not letting him "make a bargain," as he said, "vith the thief that had robbed him."

After some little difficulty, a cart was procured, and stretched out at the bottom on a heap of straw, and guarded by the constable and beadle—the only officials the town could boast, but, under circumstances, a sufficiently imposing escort—Mike Garroway was taken on his way to Guildford Jail, charged with highway robbery.

But Isaacs was not to be got rid of so easily. He followed, labouring along after the cart in which the wounded man lay stretched, and every now and then called to him, when he groaned deeper than usual, "Not to be afeard; he'd known a case vorse nor his—ten times vorse—in vvhich a highvayman got off, only because he told the gentleman, vot he'd done vith his property.

A good lawyer could get off any man if he vos only vell paid for his vork; and he'd pay him—pay him twice as much as he vos vorth, if it came to that, if he'd only do the proper thing by him, and not try to cheat him, like a thief and rascal, as the others vos. Many a good man," he went on saying, "had been hung before to-day—quite gentlemen; and there vos nothing to be afeard on if he only gave up people's goods, and did not go out of the vorld vith a lie in his throat."

It was of no use for constable or beadle to threaten him. Isaacs was not to be frightened away with such a chance before him, as he thought he had, of regaining his missing documents; and would have climbed into the cart, and searched the wounded man with his own hands, if they had not whipped the horse, made him miss his hold, and tumbled him into the road. But he caught up to the cart again, and clung to the back of it, shouting to Garroway, and promising anything and everything if he would only inform him where his papers were; or, if he didn't know, told him "to turn king's evidence, and split upon the thieves vho had got a nice-looking young gentleman like he vos into a scrape. He know'd, by the looks of him, he vos a perfect gentleman—his coat proved that, and his fine ruffles. He

vasn't the first gentleman as had taken to the road ; he know'd a dozen at least—gentlemen as vere born gentlemen, and died gentlemen, and a credit to the gallows, as he would be if he only did as he told him."

The cart reached the jail at last, when Mike was lifted from it, and carried, like a sick child, between two warders, into the prison yard, followed by the constable and beadle. Isaacs tried to force his way in too, and said, "He vas a friend of the gentleman's, vho had met vith a accident on the road ; and he vanted five minutes'—only just five minutes'—talk vith him, to make his mind easy."

It was of no use. The gates were swung in his face, and as they closed with a clang, Mike Garroway was carried into the sick ward, while the disappointed Jew stood baulked and chapfallen on the outside of the prison, vowing to bring an action against the jailer for false imprisonment.

Tired as he was, beaten and bruised by his fall upon the road, Isaacs did not care for that ; hunger and fatigue were nothing compared with the baffled rage gnawing within him, and he must vent it on some one, or he felt he should go mad.

He had had neither food nor rest since the

overnight, and on leaving the squire had gone whining and crying into Haslemere, where he bargained with a waggoner to give him a lift in his cart as far as Godalming, which place he reached just as the crowd had gathered round the inn yard to have a peep at the highwayman; and when Garroway was ultimately carried off, had followed the cart on foot to the gates of Guildford jail.

He knew old Clam was sick in bed at the "Angel Inn;" that was one comfort. He could vent his spite on him if he could not on any one else, so he went to seek him out.

"You're a pretty von to help a feller in a mess, ain't you?" cried Isaacs, bursting into the room just as the lawyer had fallen off into a nap. "You're a nice chap, and knows ven to take an easy time of it, lying in bed, when you ought to have been out, fighting as though you vere mad to save the pair on us from being ruined."

"What do you mean, Isaacs?" said Clam in a low voice, raising his head off the pillow, and looking at his noisy and unexpected visitor with anything but a delighted aspect.

"Vot do I mean! Vy don't you get up and see; you'd soon find it out then, instead of chat-

tering your false teeth there in bed, rattling them like so many dead men's bones. If you had been with me last night, as you ought to have been, you would have had something to shiver at, something as might have sent you to bed with a broken neck, instead of shamming it in the way you does, and pretending to be ill just out of spite."

"What are you talking of, Isaacs?" cried Clam, half startled by the intense savagery of the Jew's words.

"Vot am I talking on? Vy, vot every von's talking on—the mail and my bag of papers—they're gone—stolen—plundered away from me."

The news came like a thunderbolt to the prostrate and shivering Clam, who, raising himself in his bed, stared at Isaacs with terrified eyes, then faltered out, "What bag of papers? You don't mean to say *my* bills and papers?"

"Yes, but I does though, and sarves you right for having a fit at a time like this. Your bills indeed! vot's to become of my mortgage? You don't think of that, not you! though you did last night, when you tried to vheedle me out of it. You never thinks about my loss, not you, indeed; nor how I vas almost strangled fighting to save it, and nearly got my neck broke into

the bargain. Vy didn't you come along as I vouted you, though you did shake you could have bit and scratched for all that. Two on us might have managed it; two on us vould have had a better chance: and ven that vas done, you might have lain in bed as long as you liked, and stopped till I called you, for a lazy, shivering old thief that you are, who lets me do all the vork, and then tries to cheat me out of my share vhen it's done."

Clam had fallen back upon his pillow, and lay there groaning, not from pain of body, but grief of mind. Unscrupulous as he was, and used to all the trickery of the law, he knew he had no hope without the written evidence even of the fraud he had practised. He could have frightened Blakeborough with that, as he had frightened others before, and with all the intricacies of the law, of which he was a skilful master, could have encircled him in such a legal network he would have had no chance of extricating himself from the toils. He had no proof now, however questionable that proof might have been, and his reputation was not of that flourishing description to enable him to enforce his claim without, if Blakeborough resisted, as no doubt he would, his action for recovery.

Groaning as the thoughts came over him, he lay shivering in his ague fit between the sheets, more prostrate and more subdued than ever.

“Now I tell you vot it is, Master Clam,” said Isaacs, speaking with calm deliberation, “I’m not going to be cheated for nothing. You wanted to go snacks in the mortgage, and you shall go snacks in the loss. This may be your doings after all. Oh, don’t shake your head as if you were above such a thing. I knows your tricks of old; some of your nice boys from town, perhaps—ve knows you have a pick of ’em—may have stopped the mail, and robbed me as vell, just to oblige you, vvhile you could say you had had a fit, and vvasn your hands of the consequences. I’ll sveal to it if it comes to that, and have you hung for cheating me. *Some von* has done it, and you’re as likely as any von I knows on—you are, for all you looks so religious and so respectable, and speaks as though your vords valk’d over velvet.”

“Me, Isaacs! you don’t suppose I could cheat a dear old friend like you are?”

“Vouldn’t you though, if you thought you could get anything by it!” exclaimed the Jew, with a hoarse chuckle. “You had better not try it on me though, or I *might* tell a thing or two as wouldn’t be very agreeable for people to know,

though you *are* such a nice-looking man, and pays your taxes riggle."

"You are unkind, Isaacs, very, to an old friend, so ill as I am. Stop till I am well—stop till I am well, and things may not turn out so badly as you think; at least I hope not for both our sakes."

"Stop till you're dead, you mean, and then I suppose you'll remember me in your vill. Oh, oh! leave me all you've got, I should say, though I have helped you to half of it, and put you in the way to make it too, though you *did* try to cheat me—you know you did, and see vot you've got by it. Sarves you right, and I hope you may lie there and shiver for another month."

For a moment he stood scowling on the sick lawyer with his revengeful eyes, shook his clenched fist within an inch of his face, then bouncing out of the room, left the ill-used Clam half-dead with fear, and wailing over his loss; while Isaacs went below to the inn yard in hopes of obtaining a seat in the coach, at half-price for ready money, and so return to London.

No sooner had Mike Garroway been deposited in the cart—the constable and beadle with a loaded pistol on either side, to prevent the chance of his escape—than the guard and his

companions rode back over the dismal heath towards Liphook; and when they came to where the mail had been stopped, the guard explained how it had been done, and how he had fired at and wounded the man who had just been captured. "Had it been daylight, he shouldn't have cared for a dozen of them," he said, "but at night, and round that Bowl, it was no joke to be guard to a mail, and get a broken head into the bargain."

One of them suggested a mug of ale as the best cure he knew of to set a man upon his legs again, provided he didn't take too much of it; so they pulled their horses up at the "Hind Head;" and when the landlord and the loungers on the settles heard the news of the man being taken, and saw the guard himself, who could tell them all about it, a dozen mugs were stretched out to him, all foaming with the contents of the fresh barrel that had just been broached. There was no resisting the appeal; and while the miller's horse rested his weary legs on the outside, the guard occupied the post of honour by the chimney-corner, and told the crowd of anxious listeners how the four men had started out on him; how he had shot at one of them, and would have got off safe enough, and the mail too,

if they had not all set on him at once, and knocked him on the head with the butt-end of their loaded whips.

Whether the tale were true or not, and whether the guard had performed the deeds he boasted of, they all believed he had; and no hero was more loudly cheered, or told his tale more to his own advantage, or with a better grace. But seasoned as he was, and used to "stingo," the home-brewed of the "Hind Head" began to tell upon him; his words came thick and indistinctly from his tongue, until at last, all-powerful as he said he was, and able to fight a dozen men at once, John Barleycorn got the better of him, and laid the guard as prostrate as the butt end of Baxter's whip had laid him the night before.

Starting from the "Hind Head," as the headquarters from which all intelligence proceeded, a short time only elapsed before the news spread round a ten miles radius, fast as horses' legs could carry it, or peasants staggering homeward could convey the tidings of how the man in the red coat, with a broken arm, had been taken in the inn yard at Godalming; while the rest of the highwaymen had scampered off—one over the Hog's Back, and another on the London road. The fourth man they had not set eyes on, neither

had he been seen with the wounded man, and most likely had ridden off across the country, carrying the mail-bags and their valuable contents—bankers' remittances, notes, and letters of credit—with him to London.

Here was a chance for Lucas ; and when he heard of the man in the red coat being safe in Guildford Jail, he lost no time in telling it.

The highwayman would be hung of course, at least he hoped so ; and by fair means or foul he'd see the sight—see his red coat dangling in the air, and his fine frill fluttering in the breeze as he swung under the beam.

He had rather it had been Baxter of the two, for he felt certain in his own mind he was one of the gang who had stopped the mail ; and thought if he could only have seen him with the rope round his neck, handcuffed, and ready to be “turned off,” as he said, how he could have triumphed, how he could have flung his hat into the air, and doubled his fists at him in mockery ! Sally had never seen a man hung ; here was a chance for her ; and with her cap and ribbons fluttering by his side, Lucas felt he should be a proud man, and revenged to his heart's content, for the degradation he had endured, standing behind Mike Garroway's chair.

CHAPTER VII.

CHRISTMAS GAMBOLS.

HOWEVER opposed Mr. Dormer might have been to modern times, and the changes the last three centuries had brought about, he had no reason to complain of the winter that had now set in with an intensity worthy the most favoured period of the olden time. The ground was covered a foot deep with snow, and they had to clear a space to pile the logs of wood and faggots, preparatory to roasting the ox in celebration of his Christmas games.

The gambols were to be on a large scale, worthy the time of which they were to be the type; and it was a well understood fact among the neighbours that Squire Dormer's Christmas doings promised to be a sight they had not seen, even in their dreams. What it was all about they could not quite understand, but they had an apt appreciation of the good cheer they were to have, feasting from a fine ox and drinking strong ale, which they thought could make up for all deficiencies.

The note of preparation had been sounded at least a month before. Servants from the neighbouring mansions, and labouring men with their wives and families living on the estate, had been summoned to do honour to the good old English sports about to be reproduced for their especial gratification. The gentry round about had promised to attend, and all things were in a state of forwardness awaiting the advent of Christmas.

One of the greatest difficulties Mr. Dormer had had to contend with—and his betters have been posed by it before and since—was a proper “cast” of the principal characters.

The bear was a part of some consequence, capable of great filling up and bye-play. He had not much to say, it is true, for he was muzzled; but then the situations spoke for themselves, and it was imperative that Bruin should be sustained by an important and highly-gifted biped, whose chief merit would be to growl, and not get lapping at the ale too soon. A sufficiently-tamed quadruped of the species referred to, could not be obtained without making the brute footsore, walking him all the way from London on his hind legs; for Mr. Dormer would not bring himself to understand how a dancing bear could ever go upon four feet! Besides, there was no authority

for it ; not an ancient print but set him upright on his back legs. Was not the Bear and Ragged Staff an illustration of the beast's habits ? Would a noble family have condescended to place Bruin in their coat of arms, unless in the most favourable position ?

A live bear, however well brought up, might have frightened the maids and caused the children to scream ; and then again, a stuffed one couldn't dance, while a man dressed up like a bear, well tutored in the brute's habits, and, to a certain extent, partaking of his nature, was better than either, and could jump and tumble without making use of his claws, or hugging the women to death.

The bear was "cast" at last, and the part accepted by a sturdy woodcutter, who won Mr. Dormer's heart at the first leap, and promised to behave as a bear should do in the Christmas sports.

But there were other characters, characters that required the entire strength of a company properly to develop ; parts worthy of Garrick himself. So that what between the knight and the wild man, Mr. Dormer had a harassing time of it. At last it was decided, and the gentlemanly Lucas —by the kind permission of Squire Blakeborough —undertook, at a short notice, the arduous and

important character of the knight; while the wild man fell to the lot of one of Mr. Dormer's favourite retainers, a strong-bodied, good-looking, rollicking fellow enough, and quite up to the part.

The bear-leader was of less consequence—a loud voice and imposing figure were all that were required from him, so he was easily filled up. The maids had the words of their songs by heart, and after severe practice with poor Florence at the harpsichord, at which she sat anxious to please her eccentric father, and make the old ballads go off as well as she could, they acquired some knowledge of the airs they had to sing. Not so the men. There was no chance with them, nor could Florence become instructress to a set of ploughmen. They were left to do as they could, and sing harvest homes, of which there are so many, in their own way. So long as they made noise enough—and there was little doubt of that—they'd sing perhaps not so badly after all, and the "Bobtail Mare" might yet "bear the bells away."

Ever since the hour in which Mr. Dormer had invested Lucas with the spurs of knighthood, that worthy domestic had done nothing but strut up and down the house, like the unquiet spirit of some ill-used and restless champion, and almost

appeared to regard his master as the wild man whom he was to drive before him at the point of his sword. Even Sally felt the rigour of his new importance, and trembled to approach him, so frozen and unyielding had he become. His new position had elevated him above the level of his hitherto associates, and they must take the consequence as a matter of course. Lucas had not lived so long in service not to have observed that a thousand pounds a year, suddenly flopped upon a man, who had hitherto luxuriated in a sum short by a unit of the amount, estranges him from friends, and places him above the cloudy influence of single hundreds.

Sally hardly recognized the old familiar Lucas in the stern and awful-looking man before her, and would no more have ventured on calling him "Ned," as she had done twenty-four hours before, than she would have called the King "George," or the Queen "Carry." He was unapproachable, frozen, icy, and sat in the servants' hall apart and in a chair that might have been a throne from the way he filled it out; and issued his orders for the squire's meal which he—alas the degradation!—would have to carry up, stand behind his chair, and see him eat. But times might change, he thought; and if he only had a chance, the Jew

might make it worth his while, and set him above temptation and the pilfering of spoons and forks.

The day had come at last, the village bells gave forth their merry peals, and through the cold and frozen air the faggots smoked and blazed, making the hoping diners on the ox hurry on to see him steam, and twirl like a huge barrel set about with crackling fire. There was warmth to be had there at all events, and in Mr. Dormer's hall the yule log blazed—and a huge and mighty log it was—on the wide hearth piled up with wood, sending the flying sparks snapping and sparkling up the chimney.

Forms and long tables covered with platters, dishes, horns, and cups, filled up the hall of the old house; wondrous black-jacks, brimming with liquor, stood over all to slake the thirst of those who came with prime March beer, while a huge bough of mistletoe stripped from some old Druid oak, hung in the midst; and when the rout should come, and the tables be cleared away for the dance, what struggling and what kissing there would be under it! Old Dormer placed himself beneath it with a smile, wondering who would be the first to steal a kiss from him. There he stood beaming with joy, and mighty in the

glorious past he had with so much pains gathered about him. Eyeing the pearl-like berries clustering in knots amid the tender leaves, the old man stood, when Florence stole behind him, and holding him in her arms was the first to kiss him, and wish him happiness in his Christmas games.

“Happiness!” said he, brimming over with his joy, “there never was such happiness, never, since old customs died out and left us milksops instead of bone and muscle men. I have made a beginning at all events, taught them how they should do it out of the depths of my antiquarian research; and if the heads of the county don’t follow up my example and rejoice the hearts of their retainers as they ought to do, I’ll give them over as lost to all national pride, all respect for what a man ought to live for. It’s nonsense telling me people don’t care about it. Look at that splendid fellow of an ox, roasting in the midst of a crowd of happy people. Do you mean to tell me *they* don’t care for it? And when the games begin, and the feast is fairly on the table, wont they enjoy it? I warrant me, like good men and true, and they’ll eat old English roast beef with the relish of true-born Saxons. There is only one thing grieves me, one thing I can’t

accomplish, but that's the fault of the times we live in; there is no wit left, and a jester can't be had for love or money, unless *you'll* put on the cap and bells, Mr. Stapleton, and twirl a bauble, like old Will Somers did."

"I have no ready wit to help you there, Mr. Dormer," replied the curate, who had entered the hall, and stood shaking the snow off his feet. "They had a special licence to say rude, sometimes coarse things, and in these days would have their baubles broken about their heads."

"I should like to see the man try it in my house. Old as I am I'd challenge him to sword and battle-axe, and cleave him to the chine for a poltroon. Brain them with their own baubles! Gad so! that would not be so easily done. A dwarf in former times could fight as well as the best of them, and armed with rapier and dagger, could hold his own against a giant as Sir Geoffrey, and he was but a jester after all, or something very like it."

There was no jesting with Mr. Dormer on such serious subjects, that was sufficiently evident. The cap and bells of former times were sacred in his eyes, and the fool's bauble became a staff of reverence.

In the midst of the avenue, in a space well

cleared and swept from snow, the fire glowed, while the ox went slowly round between two banks of fire heaped and piled with well-dried logs. The fine perfume from the roasting beast steamed in the frosty air, and made the watchers hungry, as they stood looking with longing eyes at the rich fat caking and browning, by the red-hot fire. And when at last the meat was done, huge blocks were cut from the sides of the smoking beast and carried in triumph to the tables in the hall, round which the peasants crowded as for a feast they had not known the like of all their days.

Grace having been said by the new curate, and God humbly thanked for the food He gave, they fell to eating with a greedy relish. Plates were emptied and filled again amidst pleasant laughing, shouting, and high glee. There was no stinting here, no saving for to-morrow—that could take care of itself for once; and old Mr. Dormer sat a proud spectator of the scene, delighting in the happiness he saw surrounding him, and overjoyed with his novel and somewhat arduous achievement.

The merry-making was at its height when a loud knocking at the hall-door made them all start and wonder what the noise could mean—all but Mr. Dormer. He knew the reason well

enough, and smiled a knowing smile upon his immediate neighbour as he said in a loud whisper—

“ Now then, prepare for an illustration of the past, a realization of all the heart can desire, and as truthful as though our Eighth Harry were here to see the games. The masques at Lincoln's Inn were but child's play to this—all tinsel and gewgaw; Inigo Jones himself a toyman; and ‘rare Ben’ a writer for mountebanks, in comparison with the stalwart doings we will show you by and by. *They* had nothing but Cupids and Venuses, Neptunes and Tritons, and other demigods of the mythological and profane. Here now are the real things, bears and wild men, such as inhabited ancient Britain when men ate acorns, and wolves and bears roamed in the woods, until the age of chivalry came with our belted knights, and swept them from the land.”

Mr. Dormer could say no more, for trooping through the open doorway came country louts dressed up as mummers, after the best authorities Mr. Dormer could bring to bear upon the subject. Whether they were abashed by the strange part they had to play, or that hot ale and toast had greater charms for them, it is impossible to determine, but no sooner had they made a round of the hall than they left the grotesque to shift for

itself, and seized upon the cans of hot spiced ale with as true a relish as ancient mummers ever did.

Not so the bear; he entered with a fearful growl, tossing and tumbling into the midst of the throng, to the no small terror of the maids and children; while the bear leader held him fast by the chain, and dealt him savage blows with his sham cudgel, while he led him round the hall, a sight for them to wonder at.

Mr. Dormer sat in a state of ecstasy, and could almost have hugged the bear at every toss he made, as, walking on his hind legs, he saw him pace about with the ease and dignity of a well-accustomed quadruped: until at last, puffing and blowing with his unnatural exertions, his head was taken off, and the woodman's jolly face peeped out of the shaggy hide, to the no small amusement of the boisterous crowd, and greatly to the relief of the woodman himself.

There was another sight to come, and that was the crowning point of all. The chief actors were about making their appearance, and Mr. Dormer rose, clapping his hands to bid them welcome. A knight in full armour and a wild man to bear him company were not to be seen every day, and he was determined to make the most of them.

With slow, stately steps the gentlemanly Lucas led the wild man in, and pointed to him with a solemn dignity that took the beholders by surprise, while an overwhelming burst of applause rewarded the first efforts of the unknown knight; but whether the applause was meant for Lucas in his proper person, or for the suit of armour he was cased in, remains a mystery, although such things have happened before and since. With an ancient helmet mounted on the top of his head, and his body deposited in one of the oldest suits of armour Mr. Dormer could lay his hands on, his appearance was something quite unusual to the gaping peasants, who stared at him in a way Lucas had never been stared at before.

The shouting that greeted him appeared to rankle in the breast of the wild man, who felt he had not had the advantage of a proper entrance. Hoping to draw some of the applause to himself, he bounded forward, shaking the branch of a tree, and uttering such cries as a wild man might be supposed to make, and tugging at the rope fastened round his waist, dragged the accomplished Lucas half round the Hall. The knight was wrathful, the wild man furious, each topping their parts to the very life, until at last the unknown knight poked at him with his sword,

pricking him through the dress of skins he wore. Turning with sudden rage upon his captor, the wild man raised his branch, and struck the knight so swinging a blow with it, that he fell clattering in his armour to the ground, while the wild man flogged him as he lay at full length, and made the knight roar and cry for mercy with all the lungs he had.

“I’ll teach you to draw blood from me,” cried the incensed wild man, standing over his prostrate foe, “you sneaking, do-nothing fellow, that I would chuck into the horse-pond if it was not frozen over. You’ll prick me again, will you, and be hanged to you !”

In vain Mr. Dormer called out to end the fray ; he had no baton to throw down as a signal for the combatants to cease, nor had he thought of a trumpet to sound a parley, but he threw his handkerchief down instead, and shouted out “to stop the combat.”

Lucas laid on the ground sadly out of sorts, and helpless as a child. He tried to rise, but the weight of his armour, added to the fear of the wild man, rendered him powerless ; and when at last he was lifted from his recumbent posture, he was shorn of all his dignity, and slunk away, amidst the laughter of the crowd, into a distant

corner, where he consoled himself with long draughts of the March beer, and made faces at the wild man, whenever his back was turned, as he sat skulking and out of danger.

In the meantime Sally began casting approving glances at the wild man, and did not even look at Lucas. She felt with a woman's truest instincts, "None but the brave deserve the fair," and with a smile received the uncouth but valourous approaches of the wild inhabitant of the plains. She felt—she could not help feeling—how superior men must have been in their natural state, "when wild in woods the noble savage ran," to the polished but enfeebled race such as Lucas belonged to. Nor was the sturdy Orson indifferent to the charms of the soft-hearted Sally, by whose side he sat, as tame and gentle as though he had been brought up at his mother's apron strings all his life.

Meanwhile the rout and merriment went on; catches were sung, and the maids went through the ballads so well Mr. Dormer promised them a new gown apiece. The ploughmen sung their Harvest Homes as well as the ale they had drank would let them; everything was at its height—laughing, shouting, dancing, drinking, when Lucas became aware of the tender glances and

secret whispers passing between the inconstant Sally and the overthrower of his dignity. Valorous with ale he rose staggering from his seat, and tried to drag her from his rival's side. Sally screamed, the wild man swore, while a general riot ensued among the drunken and uproarious crew. Some taking one side, some the other, all fighting and wrangling amidst the fearful din that brought the gambols to a close. The mummers were fast asleep upon the benches, the bear-leader could hardly keep his legs, while the bear himself lay dead drunk in the middle of the floor.

In vain Mr. Dormer stamped, and called the peasants a disgrace to the olden time, and told them how our ancestors would have blushed had they been there to see them. They had drunk too much strong beer to be afraid of ancestors or squire either; and when at last the hall was cleared, and the reeling crowd went shouting to their homes, Mr. Dormer began to think that Christmas gambols would not do for modern times. The present generation were incompetent, and could not be compared to those famous days when men's heads, like their right hands, were strong, and beef and ale were a credit to the country.

And so the Christmas games were brought to an untimely close, never to be represented at the Hall again! And however much Mr. Dormer delighted to glory in the past, and talk of it, he never ventured to extol its gambols as a subject worthy of example. He felt degraded, crest-fallen, and never replied a word when news was brought next day of how the bear and the unknown knight were found lying in a ditch drunk and incapable, and how Sally—the inconstant Sally—didn't even blush to be seen walking through the village arm in arm with a wild man.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE RECOGNITION.

DURING the interval that had occurred, and while Mr. Dormer's gambols were in preparation, Martin Blakeborough had gone to London to consult Mr. Pritchard as to the best means by which he might extricate himself from his difficulties. Mr. Dormer had written the necessary though formal letter of introduction to his legal friend, and in it authorized him to transact the business arrangements according to his best judgment and discretion. He also wrote by the post to his agent in London to hand Mr. Pritchard, on his written or personal application, such sum of money as he required ; and had assured Blakeborough on his departure, when he shook hands with him, and thanked him for the chest of old books he had sent, he would find Pritchard more than a match for the worst Jew or the best lawyer in the land. "Leave him alone," said Mr. Dormer, with a comforting assurance of bettered prospects, "leave him alone to manage them. He is a rare master of the law, and knows

Coke and Littleton as well as I do the history of Robin Hood. He'll trounce them, take my word for it, and make them shake in their shoes if they try cross-purposes with him. He is rather self-willed and obstinate, and too much given to new-fangled customs, but he is a trusty man for all that, and staunch to the back-bone, as the ancient scriveners used to be."

Blakeborough had no reason to complain of his reception. Mr. Pritchard received him kindly enough, and promised to do what he could in carrying out his client's wishes.

"I see nothing to object to the advance, squire, in the way you propose, provided your title deeds are all right, and the mortgage is fairly drawn. There's plenty of land to pay it off if *you* can't, and I should like to set you on your legs again, if only to make you independent of such friends as I once had the honour of seeing you with. Take my advice, squire, and relieve yourself as soon as possible from such dangerous companions. You could not have a worse one than that man I saw with you, nor one more likely to lead you into mischief—no harm meant or done, I hope—in all London."

Blakeborough thanked him for his advice, and assured him he would not fail to profit by it; but

the Captain was away now, he said, where, he did not even know, and not likely to renew companionship with him. He had been an old friend, but that was over now.

“All the better, squire, for there was a spirit of evil looking from that man’s eyes, and which he could no more help showing, than he could help cheating, or swindling, if he had a chance,” replied the lawyer.

“You are too hard on him,” urged Blakeborough, in extenuation. “Upton may have his faults, but he has his merits too.”

“He has a happy knack of keeping them out of sight then. However, your friends are your own, not mine, and you have a right to stand up for them when you see occasion. But he can’t blind me, as he has you, for all his cunning. I tell you, squire, that man would lead you anywhere, and make you do anything; I saw it with half an eye, and how completely he held you in subjection. It is not my business to speak ill of any one, certainly nothing that’s actionable; but if that Captain isn’t a rogue—why, I am mistaken, that’s all.”

Blakeborough felt it was of no use dwelling upon a subject where he had so little to urge in its favour. His conscience told him the lawyer

was right, and hoping to close the argument, said, "I will at once own to you, Mr. Pritchard, it would have been better for me, if I had never known him."

"Better!" persisted Mr. Pritchard; "of course it would! I'd lay my life now it was he who first introduced you to this pretty pair of money-lending rogues, and got something for his pains, I warrant. There are hundreds like him hanging about town, ready to snap up a young fellow who has more guineas than wit; and when his money is gone, make a market out of him in some other way. The bare association with such men leaves a spot of dirt half a man's life can't rub out. You see I speak plainly, squire, but I don't mean the worse by you for that."

It was all true, and Martin felt it was so. That spot of dirt was even now upon him, and he almost winced before the keen eyes that looked into his, fearing he would see it eating and corroding at his heart. But there was a daring spirit about Blakeborough, which never let him flinch when face to face with danger: it was only in the apprehension of it he was a coward; once set well before him he would brave it out, and be the last to fly from it.

"By the way, squire, you'll excuse me asking

you the question, where did you and your friend the Captain, as he calls himself, meet with Mr. —what's his name—you know whom I mean, the new curate down in your parts?"

The question was an awkward one, and perhaps meant no more than was asked. But Blakeborough had an intuitive feeling of what the conversation would lead to, and prepared to face it.

"Oh! Mr. Stapleton? I knew him at college."

"And had a quarrel, I suppose?" replied Pritchard. "Rather a serious one, I should think, by the way you met. However that is no affair of mine, only I can't help being inquisitive sometimes, and a little prejudiced too you will say."

"You are right up to a certain point; we had a quarrel—a duel—on a matter not worth mentioning now."

"Oh! oh! a love affair about some college bed-maker, I suppose. We must not let Miss Dormer hear of that, must we? or our friend the curate might get into trouble."

A heavy sullen look spread over Blakeborough's face. The lawyer glanced at him over his spectacles for a minute, then took them off and amused himself by wiping the glasses.

“Oh! then it *was* a love affair, was it?” resumed Mr. Pritchard, speaking carelessly, and polishing one of the glasses with great activity, when he saw Blakeborough colour up and change countenance. “Well, that can’t be helped—there can’t be two bites at a cherry, and if young fellows will quarrel for it, they must come to loggerheads. But your friend the Captain, he did not long for the cherry too, did he?”

“No!” replied Blakeborough, with a slight curl of his lip. “He was only a looker on.”

“And, like most lookers on, saw more of the game than the players, I suppose—and perhaps lent a helping hand to win it. However, this is from our purpose, and the subject, I can see, is not a pleasant one, so we’ll drop it, and come to a pair of your other friends—you don’t seem to have been very choice in your selection—old Clam and Isaacs. I know them of old; they know me too, and I can see my way clear enough to them. They’ll threaten and bully a little; but, when it comes to the push, they’ll pull in their horns, for fear they should not be able to draw them back again. And now, good morning, squire. I must look into your affairs at once. But, as you are a simple country gentleman, and not used to town ways, take my advice—avoid its temptations,

keep a tight rein over yourself, and don't go near gaming-houses, especially with your pockets so full of money."

Blakeborough felt rather stung by the half-bantering tone in which the lawyer concluded his advice, but he determined to abide it for all that, and avoid what Mr. Pritchard so pointedly alluded to. He had little desire to bet or gamble now, even had he had the money in his possession the lawyer had given him credit for.

In hopeful anticipation of the good to be derived from his services, Martin soon forgot his momentary anger, and walked along with a light, buoyant tread, very different from the abashed and nervous step he had walked with when he last trod the crowded thoroughfare of Fleet Street.

He had no Jew now to meet—no wheedling Clam to beg of or petition to. His affairs were in safe hands; the tables would be turned on them, and they would not have it all their own way this time, as they used to have.

He came to Bolt Court, and, looking up the narrow way where he had last seen Upton, stood for a few moments wondering what had become of him, and if he were still at hide and seek, or abroad and out of harm's way. He had

heard nothing of him since the night he had received his letter at the "Angel Inn," and trusted he should never see or hear of him again.

He walked along, and, turning into the Old Bailey, took from his pocket a small packet, which he booked at the "New Inn."

"All right, sir," said the man, as he read the superscription; then, calling to a lad seated at a desk, told him to enter the parcel "to be left till called for."

Walking into Holborn, Blakeborough went on his way to the coffee-house where he was staying, near Gray's Inn, when he met a tall man with a beard, and a foreign-looking cap stuck on the top of his head. It was Upton, or he never saw Upton in his life before!

He had but a glimpse of him, for the man turned his face away as if on purpose to avoid him, and never looked back again; but he was sure it was he—there was no mistaking him, for all his false beard and foreign cap. He must have known him, too, for as they met face to face the other turned suddenly up a bye street, and was quickly out of sight.

Martin pursued his way again, not quite so cheerful as he had been, but glad, for all that, he had not stopped to speak to him.

CHAPTER IX.

THE TABLES TURNED.

MR. PRITCHARD was an active, shrewd lawyer, and when he once took a case in hand, never let the cobwebs grow about the papers, as some lawyers do. He had a difficult game to play, but he had sufficient reliance on his own tact and judgment, not only to play, but win it. He depended on the badness of the characters he had to contend with in this particular instance, and knew, if he once took a high hand, they would not dare to run the risk of defending an action at law for their bills, or mortgage either, if he once tempted them with as much money down, in quittance of their claim on Blakeborough, and sufficient to pay them back what they were actually out of pocket. He was not aware how slight a hold they had on him, for the squire had not informed him of the loss of the Jew's papers, nor had Pritchard heard of it, although the robbery of the mail on Hind Head Heath had gone the round of the newspapers, and made men doubly cautious how

they travelled unless fully armed. And no wonder, when, only a few years before, the mail had been stopped in Pall Mall in the open day.

Old Clam had returned at last to town. He looked pale and sickly, and trembled nervously when Mr. Pritchard called on him, and told him of the business he had come about. Clam knew the man he had to deal with, and spoke still more gently and softly than ever, as he fixed his eyes upon the bookcase, and begged to assure Mr. Pritchard—"every one knew what a kind and excellent man Mr. Pritchard was"—he had no wish to press Mr. Blakeborough. On the contrary, he had always looked upon him as his friend—had always treated him as such; but he was such a careless man in money matters, it was sometimes necessary to make him put his hand to paper—all properly drawn and legal documents, of course; he had lost hundreds by neglecting this sometimes. There were a few thousand pounds—"but really," said Mr. Clam, shifting his eyes to the bust on the other side, "I have no wish—you know my easy ways, Mr. Pritchard—I have no wish to trouble him unnecessarily."

Mr. Pritchard *did* know his ways, and hinted as much pretty plainly, as he came to the point at

once, and almost startled the gentle Mr. Clam into a terrible oath when he said he meant to fight against every shilling he claimed, and only intended paying him what he thought proper, or the law could make him. "What you have given consideration for I'll refund you, and what you get over and above, will enable you to build a hospital."

"A hospital, my dear Mr. Pritchard!"—Clam began to wheedle again. "A poor man like me! who never knew how to keep money, or even to put it out at proper interest? I am too easy, my dear sir—a great deal too easy ever to be rich, or build the hospital you talk of."

"Things are better than I thought, then," said Mr. Pritchard, without being in the least affected by the bounteous nature of Mr. Clam; "much better. We shall have no trouble with *you*, at all events, whatever we may have with Isaacs. I had no idea you were half so good as I find you are," continued Mr. Pritchard, with a chuckle. "But sickness brings a man down to strange things; and the next time I hear you found fault with, I'll take your part—I will—and say how kindly you behaved when you offered to forgive your claim on Squire Blakeborough."

"Do you think me a fool or a madman, sir?"

What! forgive three thousand pounds?" Lapsing again into his former amiability, he changed his tone, and said, "We ought all to forgive, my good sir. It is a part of religion I always carry out, I hope, like a good Christian should; and I do—I can forgive everything——"

"Everything—except three thousand pounds," said Mr. Pritchard, finishing the sentence.

"It is a large sum, but so long as I get it back, I can forgive him everything else."

"The best thing you can do," replied Mr. Pritchard, in his short, off-hand way, "is to come to the forgiveness first, and the three thousand pounds afterwards. Take my word for it, however much you may forgive *him*, I shan't pay you the money."

"Not pay me my money, sir!" Mr. Clam glowed like a wild Indian, and looked anything but the peaceful Christian he had just before professed himself to be.

"Not a sixpence you can't show legal and clear proof for, and even on that point we'll fight you out of court. I have done it, you know, before to-day, so don't grip the handles of your armchair as if you were throttling me. Money lent, and nothing but money lent, I'll pay, with five per cent. per annum from the date of each

loan. As for your other papers, take my advice—you may, for I shan't charge for it—put them behind the fire, and keep yourself warm while the blaze lasts ; you look cold and chilly enough."

Without another word Pritchard walked out of the room, while Clam sank back in his chair, his mouth wide open, and his eyes starting out of his head. He sat for a few minutes speechless and aghast, then uttering a sharp cry rocked himself to and fro, shivering like an aspen, whether from the effects of rage or a return of his fit, his biographers must decide.

One of Pritchard's foes was *hors de combat* ; the other was more stubborn, fought longer, and would kick and bite even when knocked down and trampled on. He knew the Jew, and the Jew knew him, that was one comfort ; so he lost no time in finding him and coming to the point, as he had done with Clam.

He found him, as Blakeborough had done, up two pair of stairs, in the dingy room, huddled over his wooden desk.

High words passed between them, and the Jew's cracked voice was heard even in the street, storming and swearing he'd have his money—have every shilling of it, or he'd hang Mr. Martin for swindling.

"This is all nonsense, Isaacs," said Pritchard, losing patience; "if you don't choose to take my offer say so, and have done with it."

"Vot! give up two-thirds of vot he owes; knock off four thousand pounds to oblige you—not if I knows it. Old Clam may do as he likes—he's a fool, and don't know vot law's made on. I shan't! so now you knows my mind."

"Bring your papers into court then if you dare, and see what you'll get by it. I always knew you were pig-headed, but I never took you for an idiot before."

"Vot! you calls names as vell, do you? I thought a gentleman like you couldn't do such things; but you're all alike, ven you finds you can't cheat a poor old Jew out of his money."

"As to cheating, that's a thing you understand better than I do," retorted the lawyer; "but since you are so sure of your case, try it, and much good may it do you."

Mr. Pritchard's hand was on the handle of the door, when the Jew called to him—

"Vell, you are in a hurry; vy can't you talk the matter over like a gentleman, and not fly in a passion as you does. I only wants a offer—a reasonable vun I means. I am not a hard man, like Clam; you can't strike a light out of him no vheres. I am

a kind-hearted feller, and you knows it, or you would not try me in the vay you does."

Mr. Pritchard still kept his hand upon the door, but made no reply. He knew the Jew must come round, and did not hurry himself, or even try to meet him half-way.

"Vell, then, I tell you vat I'll do," continued Isaacs, when he found nothing was to be got by bullying. "Put down four thousand pounds, and I'll see if I can take it up." Still there was no reply. "Vell, then, at a vord, three thousand five hundred, and not a farthing less. You vont! Then you may go about your business, for I vont come down another peg!"

But he had a good many pegs to come down before Mr. Pritchard would listen to him, and the Jew knew it well enough for all his boasting. He knew he could no more stand the evidence the lawyer could bring against him than he could lift a mountain. If he had only had his papers in his desk, he would have made a show of standing out to the last, in hopes of obtaining better terms. Pritchard did not even know this, but the Jew thought he did; and when he turned to go, called to him again, and said—

"You are a cunning man, Mr. Pritchard, and knows the fix I am in, or you wouldn't try it on

in the vay you does. You wants to take advantage of me, 'cos I vos robbed of my papers—as you have heerd on, I dare say—even I vas chucked out of the mail by a set of thieves, and half strangled.”

“ Oh !” said Mr. Pritchard, opening his eyes, and staring at him with astonishment, “ then you have nothing at all to show for it.”

“ But I can svear to it, that's as good.”

A cold perspiration broke out over the Jew's forehead, when he thought how he had betrayed himself. He comforted himself, however, by the reflection that it must have been known, sooner or later, before a settlement could have taken place ; yet he clung to the hope of their recovery with the tenacity of a leech.

“ I knows vhere to lay my hands on von on 'em as did it,” said the Jew ; “ and if he'll only turn king's evidence, and tell me vhere my papers are, ve'll see vho's to vin the day, and vwhether I am to be cheated out of my money by a thief like Mr. Martin.”

“ Good words if you please, Isaacs, Mr. Blakeborough is my client.”

“ Is he ? Then I vish you luck on him, that's all. Mind he don't pitch *you* down the stairs, and set dogs at you, as he did at me—

that's all. A pretty gentleman he is—a very pretty gentleman, and von I should not like to meet on a dark night if I had anything vorth stealing about me. If I can only prove he paid the fellows to do it, I'll hang him, I vill, alongside the other von, who may peach after all ven the rope's round his neck; unless he splits on 'em before he is tried as I wants him, and vwhich he vill do if he ain't a fool. I've got a lawyer to defend the poor young man as'll vork him to it. If the job's to be done he's the boy to do it, and I shall have my revenge if I can't get nothing else by it."

"Oh, I see your game. You want him to 'peach' as you call it on the others, and put *their* necks in a noose, instead of this 'poor young man' you are grown so fond of."

"Of course I does, three on 'em instead of von! Though there is von on 'em I vould valk all the vay to see swing for it—a tall thief of a fellow, as tried to murder me. If I could only see him hanged, I should die happy."

"Even if you lost your money, I suppose?"

"Who said that? I didn't."

His fit of passion was coming over him again, while he grew white and livid, and twisted his fingers in his hair. The lawyer only laughed at

this, and telling Isaacs when he wanted his money he knew where to come for it, turned on his heel and left the room.

The Jew sat choking with rage, but without daring to show it, until Pritchard's back was turned. He knew he had no chance with that cool, clever lawyer. His money was lost, his hoped for plunder had slipped through his dirty hands, and he cursed him with a savage but subdued oath as he stood upon the stairhead, glaring at him with ferocious eyes as he passed out at the doorway. Then he sat upon the edge of his stool again, thinking of the man who was to be tried at Guildford.

If he would only 'peach upon the others and make a clean breast of it he might save his own neck, and be the means of helping the Jew to what he so much desired. Next week would soon come round when Isaacs thought how he would hang about the court, and if any one came to see the prisoner, have him dogged to where he came from. He might hunt them out that way, and hang the whole lot of them.

There was no end to his schemes and cunning plotting, as he sat biting his nails to the quick, while the smoke blew out and the dust almost blinded him, thinking of the best way to do it.

CHAPTER X.

NIGHTMARE.

No one had heard of Dick Coombs since the night his cottage had been burnt down, nor could any of the villagers give a guess as to his whereabouts. A woman thought she saw him once standing on the top of the hill behind where his cottage had stood, looking down upon the ruins, but whether it was Dick or his ghost, she could never quite make up her mind. She inclined to his supernatural rather than physical appearance, and became at last so strongly impressed with the idea of having seen a ghost, she drew upon her imagination for the necessary accompaniments of his spiritual condition; and before a week had passed there was not a man or woman in the place, but would have known Dick's ghost from her description, out of a hundred, wrapped in a long winding sheet and puffing out blue fire.

Ned Pullen had been missing too, but then no one had seen *his* ghost, and what had become of

him people hardly cared to think. There were fewer drunken riots at the ale-house than there used to be, less fighting on the Green, and that was all; while the second best man in the village began to strut about, and show his airs almost as savagely as Ned had done before him. He was not quite so hard a drinker it was true, and had had two or three hard tussles, before he arrived at his present enviable position; whereas Ned was always half-drunk: but drunk or sober was strong as the side of a house, and the best bruiser miles about. No one had a chance with him; but the second best man might yet get thrashed, and there were a dozen or more thought they could do it too, if it came to that.

But although neither Dick nor Ned had been heard of, poaching still went on, and the squire's preserves were always the first to suffer from their depredations. The men marched over the estate at night, wiring his game without fear of interruption. There was no Dick Coombs to look after them now, the squire's present keepers contenting themselves with talking big, and watching by day instead of night. They had no fancy for broken heads, and what good should they get by it after all?

Night by night the poachers kept their rounds,

and day by day the tale went on of how they had been seen upon the squire's land, almost within sight of the windows. His outhouses began to suffer too—one of them had been burnt, and his ricks set on fire. Two men always led them on. One of them a tall, powerful man, as like Ned Pullen as could be. The other a shorter man but wide in the shoulders, like Dick Coombs; and yet it couldn't be Dick, or why had his ghost appeared on the top of the hill looking down upon the ruins of his cottage?

The depredations became more daring every time, but while the squire was away there was no help for it. The very horses were not safe in their stalls, and Lucas lay awake night by night, fearing lest he should be burnt in his bed. He could not sleep, or if he did, he woke up with a start and fancied he saw the red fire in his eyes, and heard Sally screaming to him for help. This was worse than waiting on the squire's friends, and not to be endured by a man who had lived a life of ease so long, and had a right to expect it all his days.

The very night before, Lucas could have sworn it—or if he did not see it it must have been a nightmare nothing but pork chops for supper could have brought about—Lucas could have

sworn, and told Sally of it—who only laughed at him (she had done nothing but laugh at him lately) —that he had seen a man looking in at his window casting a most felonious eye upon his box—that box in which he kept all his savings and his perquisites. It could not have been the tom cat this time, for he saw a pair of eyes, large yellow eyes, staring at him as he lay in bed. He tried to call, but his tongue felt glued to the roof of his mouth; and though he opened it, he couldn't make a noise. There he laid steaming with fear, and all the while the eyes kept staring at him; and he verily believed would have stared until he told Sally of it, only he put his head under the bed-clothes and left his box to take care of itself.

If the squire did not come back from London soon, Lucas determined to sleep in the room next to the maids. There he should be safe. If *he* could not make a noise *they* could for him, or he would make a companion of the groom, sorely against his dignity, and let him sleep in the room with him. Anything was better than lying wide awake, thinking his throat was going to be cut by a set of low-minded, ill-bred poachers, who had not the least notion of what gentility meant.

But this night he would be on the safe side at all events; so he screwed an iron bar across his

window, and sat watching from it with a loaded blunderbuss in his hands. He locked and double locked the door, put a chest of drawers against it, and his heavy box on the top of that, then sat as in a citadel, armed against all comers. They could not creep through the keyhole, but they might peep at him and shoot him through it. He had a plan against that, and plugged it up with a piece of wood. Now let the maids laugh at him if they would, and jeer at him for wanting to sleep in the room next theirs. Lucas felt relieved, and determined to stay up all night wrapped in a blanket, at the window, with his blunderbuss ready cocked.

He was so used to lying awake, it was quite a treat to him, to be sitting up looking at the moon out of his barred-up window. There was no chance of the nightmare now, and he felt warm and comfortable. It was quite pleasant in its way, and he could sit by the fire in the servants' hall, and take his nap there if he felt sleepy in the daytime; anything was better than dreaming of Mr. Baxter's fist, Mike Garroway's red coat, or of their boots creaking down the stairs.

Lucas thought he had never seen the moon so bright; he sat looking at it, thinking of the

night he had run away from London. It was just such a night, and how he had had to dodge about the corners of the streets, for fear somebody should see him with a large parcel of plate under his arm. And when he got into the open road, how he had had to lie in a dirty ditch when the horse patrol came by.

Here he looked at his box, standing like a sentry on the top of the drawers placed against the door, and almost felt inclined to open it, and have a peep at its glittering contents. But just then there came a cloud across the moon, and Lucas did not quite like to go ; the thieves might climb up to the window when his back was turned and see him at it.

So he sat where he was, prying into the yard, and at the outbuildings, until his eyes grew heavy and he almost nodded in his chair.

It was early morning, everything was hushed and quiet. There was not even the baying of a hound, nor the twittering of a bird to break the calm : chanticleer himself was fast asleep upon his perch, and had not waked with his cheerful crow the sleeping hens, or made them take their heads from under their wings. Lucas had no such pleasant company to roost near ; the hens of Chase House had fluttered him out of their

society, nor had the ill-conditioned cook shown that consideration to his dignity, Lucas thought he had a right to expect. She had even gone so far as to scratch his face, and Sally had stood by and seen the damage done without flying at her cap, and tearing it in pieces ! Unlike chanticleer, he had to roost by himself without the consolation of his seraglio.

Lucas had dozed—he had had a good half-hour's nap at least, and when he woke the clouds had it all to themselves. The moon was gone, where he could not guess ; the outhouses were indistinct in the gloom that now surrounded them, and the peaceful dove-cot looked like a large-headed spectre standing in the midst of the open yard. He was chilly, nervous, and uncomfortable, his eyes were stiff from want of sleep, and he felt half inclined to put his blunderbuss down and tumble into bed.

The house dog gave a sudden bark ! Lucas's heart leaped to his mouth. The dog would not bark for nothing. He looked about the yard again, his knees knocking together, and his hands grasping his blunderbuss. Someone was climbing into the yard ; he saw a man making his way over the piled stack of faggot wood. There he was, leaning over it. If he once got

down, he'd wrench the bar away, and—Lucas fired!

The sharp rattle of shot told how true had been his aim, as a heavy body fell with a fearful clump to the ground; so did Lucas! Half dead with fear, and trembling, he had taken his aim, when the kick of the blunderbuss knocked him backwards, and he fell on the floor overcome with terror.

The report of the gun roused up a thousand echoes. Dogs barked, horses neighed, and a general commotion took the place of the calm that had been so suddenly invaded by the watchful Lucas. Doors banged, women shrieked, and his doubly bolted and barricaded door was besieged by Sally and the cook, screaming and knocking on the outside. But Lucas did not hear them; he was past the sense of sound, and lay stretched upon the floor, as pale and death-like as the supposed robber on the outside.

The women crept into their room again, and huddled in a corner until the day should come. The dogs gave over barking, the horses ceased to neigh, the few lights that glimpsed about the stables were put out, and chanticler himself nestled closer to the side of a favourite hen, and left the darkness to take care of itself, until the

time should come when he would give the signal for the sun to rise.

And when it did ascend the heavens, and the day was fairly on the alert, Lucas crept off his bed, pale and ghastly, and opened his door to the roused household, anxious to know why he had fired, and what he had fired at.

“A man !” faltered Lucas ; “the same fellow who looked in at my winder the night before last ; he wont look in again ; he’s cold enough by this time, and now his companions wont let me have no peace for killing him. I’ll give warning, I will ; anything is better than being murdered, as I know I shall be, if I stay here much longer.”

But where was the man ? He had crept away, perhaps. Lucas saw him fall, and his blood must be somewhere. They searched, and searched, but could find nothing. Lucas rubbed his eyes, pointed to where he had fired, and where he saw the man fall. There was no man, no blood, nothing but a bundle of faggots that had tumbled down from the stack ; and when they took it up and looked at it, they saw how the shots had torn and splintered it.

Was it a bundle of faggots after all, he had shot at, and not a man ?

Lucas never closed his eyes that livelong day; they would not let him. The women laughed and mocked at him, the cook flung dirty water in his face, for frightening her out of her first sleep, that generally lasted until morning, and drove him from the chimney corner in dismay; while, worse than all, the groom swore at him, and told him, "if he ever came that trick again, he'd knock the breath out of him, and leave more marks on him than he had left on the bundle of faggots; he'd dust his jacket for him, and no mistake, if he ever tried his hand at a blunderbuss again in the middle of the night."

Lucas had made a mistake, and like other heroes had counted more dead men than he had killed; but what of that? he had let the robbers know the kind of man they had to deal with, and what they had to expect, if they came peeping in at his window any more. Let the groom have his throat cut if he would, there was no help for it, and Lucas did not much care whether it were cut or not, so long as his own were safe. The blunderbuss would read them a lesson, and let them see, if he could knock down a bundle of faggots, he had quite as good a chance with them, and might knock down a thief as well.

CHAPTER XI.

ANTICIPATIONS.

DURING Blakeborough's absence in London, he had heard of the nightly trespass and poaching on his land; but he had other and more important matters to attend to. Let him be once relieved of his present troubles, he would take active measures for the suppression of the wild and lawless crew who prowled on his estate, snared his game, broke his fences, and fired his barns. He knew the temper of the man he had to deal with. The burnt cottage was but a preface to the waste and ruin Dick Coombs meant to work upon him, and, unless he were first hunted up and brought to justice, there would be no safety for him night nor day. He would be waylaid, murdered, if this state of things went on much longer.

The spirit of revenge had taken possession of the old man, and Blakeborough knew he would make that vengeance as terrible as he could. He had made common cause with Ned Pullen and

his gang, and would stick at nothing to be revenged on him for the ruin of his child. Martin blamed himself for that, and wished he had never seen Nelly, or seen her only with indifferent eyes. He would have made the best atonement in his power, had the old man let him; but he had taken the law into his own hands, and must abide by the consequence.

What if the girl had run away? he argued to himself. That was no fault of his. He had only followed Upton's advice, and would have proved a friend to her, and her father too; but her flight had ruined everything—had made it appear as though he had contrived it; when, if the truth were known, he knew no more about it than old Dick Coombs himself. But to be threatened, opposed by a man like Dick, put him in a fury, and he resolved to let the old ruffian, as he called him, know who was to be master—the squire or his man. Let him be once free of his incumbrances, he would drag him from the hole he lurked in—drag him out with his own hand, and send him off to jail. He knew their haunt, and before long would hunt them out of it.

Full of these and of other thoughts and cares that harassed and oppressed him, he at length resolved on his return from London to his place

in the country. He had left Pritchard busy in his affairs, had learnt from him the workings of the old Jew's mind, and the hopes he built on the man who was now waiting his trial turning round on his companions. Would he betray them? Would he turn king's evidence?

These questions Blakeborough asked himself over and over again. At all events, *he* would not, could he have changed places with him. He would have suffered fifty deaths rather than break his word to friend or foe, if he had once pledged his faith to them.

A thousand thoughts and speculations crowded on him as he rode upon his way; and, when he arrived at Guildford, he could not help riding a little distance round to where the prison was, to look at its old walls, and inspect its massive gateway.

There was no hope of escape from such a place as that; but he thought, if he were once within it, he'd try. Better break your neck leaping from a wall, than let the hangman do it for you. There was more daring, more of the soldier and less of the felon in it. He would like to have seen Garroway, if only to whisper this counsel to him, to tell him to be of good heart, and meet his death, if it must come to him, bravely and silently, and like a man.

Suddenly there came a peal of bells, and a distant bray of trumpets, while the people came hurrying by him, as he sat upon his horse looking at the prison gates, running onward to meet the noise. Something unusual must have taken place, and he asked a man, as he went by him, what had happened.

“Happened!” cried the man; “don’t you hear the trumpets and the bells? The judge and all the grand folks are come to try the prisoners in jail, to be sure. It’s a sight to see, I can tell you—the judge and sheriff in a fine coach, and the javelin men walking afore ’em through the town. He’s a good ’un for hanging, is the judge, anyhow, and doesn’t waste much time about it.”

The fellow ran on again, hoping to see the sight, and left Blakeborough—a little paler, perhaps—staring up the street, and listening to the bells.

He sat for a few minutes, then turning his horse’s head, rode slowly past the prison on his homeward way.

He arrived at last, weary and jaded, when he had his horse well groomed and fed, and gave directions to the man to keep the saddle on him—he might want him in a hurry, and he was to be sure to feed him well. He hung the bridle up

with his own hand, told the groom to let it remain just where he had put it, and to do nothing but what he bid him.

There was an anxious yet determined look about his face, when he went into his room, and heard without a single gesture of impatience the long tale Lucas had to tell him of the robber looking in at his window, and his shooting at him.

It was a fine opportunity for Lucas, and he made the most of it, dressing up his courage in laurels of his own gathering. He said nothing about the bundle of faggots, though, nor of the cook's throwing dirty water in his face. That was matter of private history, not likely to interfere with his public daring.

Lucas had all the talk to himself. His master never so much as replied to him, but sat abstractedly, leaning upon his elbow, and looking at the untasted meal before him. Lucas did not know what to make of this. Was he thinking of some reward to give him? or was his mind occupied with something else, and not attending to him?

"I hope Captain Upton is well, sir," said Lucas, edging himself well round the table, so as to have a full view of his master's face. Blakeborough did not appear to hear that either. He

tried again. "And Mr. Baxter, sir, and the other gentleman who drank claret, and went away with Mr. Garroway?"

Blakeborough heard that fast enough, and looked across the table, to the no small discomfiture of Lucas, with a louring brow. Lucas was however so intently occupied wiping a plate, he did not even appear to notice him.

"Get the brandy out, and leave your infernal jabbering, if you don't want to be pitched down the staircase as the Jew was," cried his master, in angry and impatient tones.

Lucas did *not* wish to be pitched down the staircase, and therefore brought the brandy without a word. He poured his master out a glassful, watched how he put it to his lips, then let his hand sink down upon the table without even tasting it.

After a silence of some minutes, Blakeborough becoming aware he had not drunk the liquor, tossed it off, and told Lucas to take the meal away. "He had dined," he said, "at Guildford, and was not hungry."

"Talking of Guildford, sir," said Lucas, keeping at arm's length from his master's reach, "Sarah asked me to ask you, sir, to let her have a holiday. She never saw a man tried, and as

the assizes are on on Monday, and the miller is one of the witnesses, he has offered to give us a lift in his cart—not that I ever rode in one—to see what a trial's like.”

The perspiration spread itself in cold drops over Blakeborough's face. He knew his servant's meaning too well to be deceived, and Lucas was perfectly astounded by the way in which his master answered, after a slight pause—

“There's time enough for that; if I don't want you for anything, you can take your sweetheart where you like.”

Lucas had expected a volley of abuse, instead of which his master answered him as though he had become suddenly aware of his superior and unapproachable accomplishments. It could not do much harm, he thought, if he touched the same string again; a little more strongly, perhaps, and closer to his purpose.

“For my part,” said Lucas, smiling his best smile, and passing one of his paw-like hands over the other, “I'd rather see the hanging; that's more to my fancy, and if I once set eyes on Mr. Garroway's red coat——”

He had no time for more. Blakeborough started to his legs, and seizing a decanter full of wine, hurled it at him. Lucas saw the motion,

had been half prepared for it, and shot out of the room, just as the flying glass struck upon the edge of the door and split into a thousand pieces.

It was a lucky miss for Lucas, and he knew it. Had it hit *him* instead of the door, adieu to hope! his personal appearance would have been obliterated for ever; his gashed and mangled head, a sight to look at! He darted down the stairs, waited a moment at the bottom to listen if he were followed, then creeping back, heard his master go into his mother's room, lock himself in, and throw himself upon the bed.

The faithful servant, unwilling to disturb so good a master, took his shoes off, and crept silently as a mouse back into the room, and listened at the bolted door. The key was in the lock, so he could not peep through it, but he listened at it, and heard his master moaning and sobbing on the bed his mother had died on, like a broken-hearted woman. As broken-hearted as Sally would be, if he were to run away—it might come to that—and leave her behind him.

Stealing back again, Lucas put on his shoes, rubbed his hands with delighted satisfaction, and after a hearty supper, went to bed. He felt so perfectly happy, he had no fear of nightmare or anything else to disturb his dreams.

He put the chest of drawers against the door, locked it carefully, felt that his bar was safe, then slunk between the sheets in the most happy condition a mind like his was capable of.

But the nightmare came upon him as he lay, pressing on his chest, and forcing open his voiceless mouth. The gurgles were in his throat; his hands worked, and his breast heaved as if with hidden torture. He laid for an hour with all his mental horrors thick upon him, and when he started up at last, he almost shrieked and cried for mercy, offering all he had ever stolen, so they would let him go.

And was it only a dream after all! He looked about, under the bed, by the side of the drawers, and inside the cupboard, fearing to meet the officer he had seen in his sleep, come in at the window, lifting his iron bar as though it were made of lath, and holding a loaded pistol to his head, ask him for the key of his box—his box where he kept all his thievish treasures! The man took it from him by main force, tore it away from his neck where he always kept it tied with a string, and nearly strangled him, then put a pair of handcuffs on him, and was on the point of hurrying him off to prison—when he woke.

CHAPTER XII.

THE TRIAL.

THE distant spire of the village church was musical with its Sunday peel of bells, and trooping through the meadow paths, or splashy roads, the humble congregation sped along their way to prayer and contemplation.

The wintry snow no longer lay in heaps, blocking the way, or glittering on the boughs. The white festoons no longer arched themselves across the wooded lanes, or formed a crystal canopy for them to walk beneath. Their white, fantastic forms had disappeared, and the bare hedge rows, twisted and tangled with faded briars, were damp and wet from new fallen rain. It pattered still among the leafless trees, dropping from pendent boughs in silver drops, as the morning's sun threw out its slanting beams to cheer the face of nature up, and make it joyous with its golden light.

Along those country paths, came rich and poor, each on his way to hear the Word of God,

join humbly in the heartfelt prayer, and in that house which levels all distinctions, to bow and stoop abashed beneath the eye of Heaven. The peasant's hobnail boot, the homely patten, and the tidy clog, each following the same track towards the village church; the ploughman and his master, with their wives and daughters, going hopefully along, cheered and uplifted by the sound of those village bells.

The hum of the congregation quieted itself at last into a solemn calm. The old rector was led into his pew, the village choir left off tuning their pipes and fiddles in the loft, and the simple worship of this village church commenced.

The lessons read, and the psalms sung in homely base or treble, the sermon began.

The curate, like a wise teacher as he was, instructed them through the medium of their senses, guiding them by easy paths to that high ascent which leads to heaven! His words were plain, and fitted to the ears of those he preached to; nor was the superior intelligence of his more gifted hearers startled by his homely truths, his moral lessoning. He told them how small neglects led on to greater blemishes, and by slow degrees to vice. How depravity was always tempting, and the easy road that led to it lay

through the passions. There were many paths, and each one leading downwards. Improvidence and drunkenness were set on either side, while idleness spread out its velvet way for them to walk and rest on; but where did those paths lead? To doubting and despair—to a dismal swamp where men sank down, instead of climbing, as the virtuous climbed, to light and the Hereafter Promise! *Their* way was rough at first, and set with thorns and briars; but when that struggling way was passed they found a peaceful valley, green with hope and everlasting in its verdure. Where had the others led? To robbery and murder—to the condemned cell, where the guilty shrieked and cried in vain for the mercy they had denied to others; and when at last the gallows stood before them, and they must expiate under the dreadful beam, the offences they had committed against God and man, what were their thoughts? what was their penitence? How they would wish and pray, when too late, they had taken the rougher road at first, to find their peace out in the end!

The lesson was a timely one, and levelled at many vices which had recently sprung up in the village, to the trespass on the squire's

land, and the man who was to be tried at Guildford.

Example had been wanting to guide the less instructed in their duty, and Blakeborough, who had gone to church that day, sat doubting and abashed. He felt all eyes were fixed upon him; he alone was spoken at, when the curate dwelt on the evil bad companionship leads to, and the punishment it brings.

And yet the preacher's words were called to mind by others also, each taking to himself some portion of the discourse he felt his doings merited, and promised to amend them, for fear the new curate should preach at him again, and make him blush to hear the truth.

Not so Blakeborough; he felt he had been pointed out to public notice as a man whose bad example had been the cause of the late ill-doings in the neighbourhood, and held up as a caution and a warning to them. There was nothing in the curate's words he could single out as levelled at himself directly, but the general tenor of his discourse was plainly meant for him—at least he thought so, and he slunk away from the rest of the congregation at the church door, and walked some miles about for fear of meeting any of them.

Yet all the way the words rang in his ears, though he walked fast and tried to shut them out, until by degrees he came to feel the truth of the words the curate had uttered, and that they might be meant for others, as well as himself.

The first heat of his passion over, he called the words up one by one, and felt less inclined to quarrel with them than he had done at first. He knew his example had not been a good one ; but the time might come when his bettered life would make amends perhaps, and he could sit beneath that pulpit without shrinking as he had done, or turning from the church porch. The coming morrow was to be the pivot on which all his actions were to turn, and from it date an altered life, or the hurrying on to worse extremes.

The morning came at last ; he rose from his sleepless bed, and walked about his room restless and feverish ; he longed to be at Guildford to hear the trial, and see the prisoner as he stood in the dock. The assizes were on that day, and Mike Garroway was the first on the list to be tried ; there was no chance of his acquittal, the evidence was too direct, and if found guilty he would be hung.

Blakeborough had sat up late the overnight,

and in the morning early had been busy sorting papers and burning letters. He had had breakfast in his sleeping-room, where he packed a small valise, took it with him into the stable, and told the groom not to displace it, as he might have occasion to go to London in the course of the day, and should want it. He fed his favourite horse with his own hands, saw the saddle still on his back, and his bridle where he had hung it overnight; then walked back again and looked out of his window with a restless and impatient air, bending his knit brows first on one side, then the other.

He was walking down the staircase when he met Lucas creeping up them, who slunk into a corner on the landing when his master passed him, and looked almost as anxious and uneasy as Blakeborough himself.

The miller's cart was to be at Haslemere at half-past eight, and Sally had all her ribbons fastened. Lucas had forgiven her her past slighting, and was impatient to be gone; but how was he to set about it? It was more than his place was worth to go without leave, and how was he to get it if he did not ask for it? The decanter had left an ugly mark upon the edge of the door, and some of the flying pieces had hit him

rather smartly. He did not want to run any further risks by speaking to his master, while he had that horrid frown upon his face.

He hung about his heels, however, and came upon him at every turn, watching for an opportunity. He knew he must be quick about it, or the miller's cart would be gone; and how should he get on then?

His master was coming up again, and now he'd try it. He was on the point of opening his mouth, when Blakeborough put a letter in his hand, told him to go over to the Hall with it at once, and wait an answer.

"Wait!" cried Lucas, as though he had never heard the word before.

"And bring an answer back, as I told you. I shall want you again when you return, as I have several little things for you to do."

Lucas took the letter with the worst possible grace, and went into the kitchen to tell Sally to take her ribbons off again, the miller's cart would be gone, and there was no chance of the trial to-day.

"It's only done to spite me," he said, "but I'll spite somebody else before I have done with him—I will as sure as spoons is spoons."

He went muttering up the stairs, put the

letter in his pocket, and walked sulkily off towards the Hall.

No sooner was this faithful servant out of sight, in whose confiding innocence his master had so much reason to feel happy, than Blakeborough mounted a horse—his favourite one still resting with the saddle on his back—and rode off in the direction of the London road. But, before going, he left particular directions for Lucas to be sure and wait till he came back; he was only going for a ride, and should soon return.

The assizes were on at Guildford. The commission had been read on the Saturday before; and a man, name unknown, was to be tried for highway robbery, and for stealing the King's mail-bags from the Portsmouth coach.

The prisoner was arraigned upon the indictment, and, when placed in the dock, his face was pale and bloodless; he looked sick and ill, and his right arm hung in a sling. He was dressed in a red, flashy coat, but its colour was dimmed and faded, and in places the cloth was stained and stiff, as if blood had soaked into it, while the tinsel lace was torn, and hung in tatters here and there, in mockery of its former finery.

But for all his pale and sallow cheeks, there was a bright though feverish sparkle in his eye,

and he looked about as though he expected to see some one whom he knew. The court was full—almost to suffocation; yet he appeared to take in every face that stared at him with eager curiosity, then sank his eyes upon the floor in front of the dock; and there, just under it, stood an old, wrinkled Jew, winking and leering up at him.

He raised his head again towards the judge, and stood waiting for his trial to begin.

The prisoner pleaded “Not Guilty,” and still refused to tell his name, or where he came from.

The evidence was direct. There was not a single flaw in it for the most subtle lawyer to lay hold of, or twist into a doubt. John Bushell swore to him as one of the three men he had seen going towards Liphook early in the morning, the day before the mail was robbed. The landlord of the “Bell” recognized him as one of three men who had left his inn to go—as they said—to Portsmouth, but whom he saw afterwards turn into the London road. There was no doubt about him; he could swear to his red coat, and was only thankful he had not brought discredit on his beds by sleeping in them. The guard swore point blank to him too. He had fired at him, and broken his arm at the moment he and

another flashman were forcing open the boot of the coach. The landlord and ostler from the "King's Arms"—although the last was an unwilling witness—gave unmistakable evidence of his being the same man who had been brought into the inn yard by two others, and a pretty noise they had made, shouting at the gate. They had never lost sight of him since the time he was first laid on his bundle of straw, until he was carried off in the cart to jail.

The evidence was conclusive—not a single link was wanting; and the whole bearing of the case looked black and ominous to the prisoner at the bar. He knew it as well as they did, and had made up his mind to the worst.

The prisoner would have been undefended, but that a learned counsel undertook his defence, as he said, out of consideration for the awful position in which a fellow-creature was placed. He did not tell the judge *who* had sent him down, and paid him well to do it; neither did he say how he had urged the prisoner to betray his companions, and save his own neck—as the Jew had told him to do—when he saw him in his cell. He was one of those few hangers-on about the sessions who bring discredit on a noble profession by taking the poor felon's money, and then

leaving him in the lurch ; but he was sufficiently well known to the judge and the members of the bar, and his advocacy was not likely to be of much service, though he cross-questioned, brow-beat, and threw doubts on the veracity of witnesses, almost as well as the best counsel of them all.

He rose for the defence, while the Jew stood looking up in Garroway's face, winking towards the counsel, and nodding his head encouragingly to the prisoner—his face working into a thousand diabolical contortions, while his chin must have been bare from the constant pulling he gave the hair under it.

There was nothing very wonderful in the defence, though the learned counsel spoke with fluid confidence, and cautioned the jury, as most counsel do in such cases, how they brought the blood of an innocent man upon their souls.

“Nothing had been proved,” he said, “to hang a man upon ; no property had been found upon him, nor had he a single guinea in his pocket, when he was searched, to help himself, or to obtain that professional assistance necessary to rebut the evidence the crown had been at such pains to bring against him. But charity was its own reward, and he felt he was only doing his

duty to his country and the cause of innocence by undertaking the defence of a man so unjustly and monstrously accused!" He argued upon the facts of the case as they were brought against the prisoner, and maintained, "that not only did they not establish one tittle of evidence against him, but on the contrary afforded the most incontestable proofs of his innocence. He had not been recognized as an associate of thieves, nor was there a single man who could point his finger at him, or denounce him as a highwayman. Had he been so, he would have taken the benefit of that wise provision of the law, and saved himself by betraying his companions. The king's mercy, it was well known—and he urged it on the attention of the court, as well as on that of the prisoner at the bar—would be extended to him, as it had been extended to others, if he only confessed who were his accomplices."

There was a slight pause; while the Jew, in an agony of excitement, looked up in the blank face of Garroway, talking at him with his lips, and jerking his head towards the counsel, for him to pay attention to what he said, and not mind the judge; who here interposed a few words, by way of correction to the learned counsel's method of proceeding.

His eloquence not having the desired effect he had anticipated, of inducing the unknown man to confess, the learned counsel went on again.

“The man who stands there in peril of his life—and it would be folly to argue he is *not* in peril of his life—has not divulged his name. He is anxious to preserve it from the knowledge of those who would be pained by the dreadful position in which he is placed, and no doubt wishes to keep it, and his friends, from public notoriety. But whether his name be known or not, I would impress it upon the attention of the court, and on the prisoner’s attention too, that when property is stolen—and in this case valuable property has been stolen—the law is always merciful, and views with consideration the conscientious disclosure a prisoner makes, by which he may, in some way, atone for his errors by a just and proper restitution of property that has ceased to be of value to himself.”

The Jew had edged himself under the very front of the dock, nodding to the prisoner, and making signs for him to tell all he knew. It was all quietly done, and not sufficiently apparent to attract the notice of the court.

Garroway saw his actions, and understood what he meant well enough, but took no further

notice of him ; while the Jew, livid with anxiety, and furious at the other's indifference, showed his teeth at him, put his knuckle to the side of his neck, jerked his head a little on one side, and made a slight "click" with his tongue.

The judge summed up briefly, bringing all the points of the evidence to bear against the prisoner, even still more strongly than they had done before. He did not even condescend to notice the arguments for the defence, further than by congratulating the learned counsel on his well-known charity and unbought eloquence, while the brazen cheeks of the barrister took a little deeper tinge at this compliment from the bench, but that was all. The judge went on, and brought his duties to a close. The jury returned their verdict "Guilty," and Mike Garroway heard sentence of death pronounced upon him with blanched cheeks, but without any further change in his appearance. "He was to be hanged by the neck until he was dead, and might God have mercy on his soul!"

The court was cleared, the highwayman had been found guilty, and the shouting of the crowd outside, reached Garroway, as they conducted him to the condemned cell. He asked what the shouting meant, and when the jailer told him it was

because he was going to be hanged, turned sick and cold, and almost fainted in their arms.

“And sarve him right, too,” cried Isaacs, “for cheating me out of my money in the vay he has done. It’s no fault of your’n, you did your vork vell enough, but you must knock off something, now he’s to sving for it.”

Whilst the learned counsel and the Jew stood wrangling in the passage of the court, the miller whipped his horse and started on his way, to be the first to carry the news into Haslemere. But John Bushell would not submit to that, nor would Dobbin either. It was the first time Mrs. Bushell had seen Dobbin put on his mettle; the miller’s horse was before him, and Dobbin’s reputation was at stake. Off he went at first as though nothing had occurred to ruffle him, but his mind was made up for all that. The miller’s horse did his best, and went along at a tremendous pace. Dobbin carried double, but soon let him see what he could do when put to it. He caught him up when half way to Godalming, and Mrs. Bushell looked a little frightened when she saw the spokes spin round like smoking catherine wheels, side by side for half a mile or more, the miller and John Bushell looking straight before them all the while, not taking the slightest notice of one another.

The pace grew too much for the miller's horse, while Dobbin was as fresh as ever ; and when he swung his tail and passed with a triumphant snort wasn't Mrs. Bushell pleased, and didn't she promise him a pint of the best ale she'd got in the house ; she would draw it for him herself, and with her own plump hands sop a loaf of bread in it, "for shaking," as she said, "the dust out of the miller's coat in the way he had done."

John was the first in at Godalming. Dobbin took care of that. The people stood at the corners of the High Street, or at their shop doors, and when they heard the verdict, what a shout they all set up ! "He'd stop the mail another time, would he, and knock the guard on the head ; why didn't he come and do it now ?"

But the chief excitement was at Haslemere ; people met them on the road, and Mrs. Bushell felt herself a person of some consequence, as they gathered round the chaise, and the squire himself actually condescended to stop at the "White Horse," and ask her all about it. The man was condemned to death, and the folks outside the "Horse" shouted even louder than the good people had done at Godalming.

Dobbin had his ale and bread ; the crowd went away to tell their friends and neighbours

what they had heard, and Squire Blakeborough rode off towards Chase House.

There was but one sad and disappointed man out of the whole community, and he stood leaning against a post outside the "King's Arms" at Godalming. His hands were buried in his pockets—there was plenty of room for them—and he kept turning and turning them about. But had they only left the young man where he was, the ostler might have had a hundred guineas to jingle in them; he'd have married the barmaid on the spot; but Jane must wait another year now. "He never had the luck of it noways, and now they was going to hang the man out and out, on purpose to cheat him of his money."

In another fortnight the gallows was built upon Gang Hill; and when the shaking culprit was lifted from the cart, an old Jew called to him from the midst of the crowd, and told him to ease his conscience like a man, and not die like a thief, as he was, cheating people out of their property. "There's plenty of time to do the right thing before you're turned off, and you've no notion how much more comfortable you'll feel a'terwards."

But Mike Garroway died true to his faith, and never told who his companions were, or what his

name was. Ten guineas had been sent to him from some unknown quarter while he lay in jail, but who sent it, or who the prisoner was, no one ever knew. The usual shouts and yells terrified the last hoping prayer out of his mind, as he stood, pale and trembling, under the beam. Another moment and a swaying corpse hung under it, turning and twisting on the tightened rope. The crowd saw a red bundle of rags dangling in the air, and that was all! His fine coat stood out in bright relief, his shirt frill fluttered, and all was over with poor Mike!

And side by side with the creaking gibbet another was set up, and under the broken Hind Head Hill two corpses hung in chains, the one black and festering in its foul decay, the other with some trace of human form about it, with a red piece of finery twisted round its top—and on that gibbet hung poor Mike! He would not startle at the whistle now, nor shudder when he heard the other creaking in his chains. And yet how cold his neck had felt, and how he had pulled his collar up when he passed it a month before! Now, side by side, as gaunt and horrible to look at, he hung himself! And when the night wind blew, and its moaning sigh swept over those bleak hills, who knows but the new-set corpse might have held his

fleshy hand out by the light of the horned moon, and grasped the other's bony fingers in horrid fellowship!

The highwayman was dead—the excitement died away, the guard's horn sounded over the heath again, while the coachman pointed to the gibbet as they passed, and told the passengers how the man had robbed the mail, and been hanged on Gang Hill for it. But when the mail went by at night, the coachman lashed his horses on and kept a sharper look out than ever, while the guard leant over at the back of the coach with his pistols ready cocked, and held his blunderbuss in his hands, fearing the very shadows on the path would spring up into men, ready to knock him on the head, and rob the mail again.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE COPSE.

THE gallows had done its work, Mike Garroway had expiated his offences in the sight of gaping thousands, and Lucas would gladly have given a month's wages to have had a peep at him. How he would have yelped and hooted if he only had had a chance. But there was no help for it and he was forced to submit to the squire's orders, who sat within his room the whole day long, and never spoke a word. Nor did Lucas neither. He was sulky, savage at being baulked of his day's pleasure. He had no chance of seeing the man's face now any more than he had of witnessing his trial, and hardly condescended to speak to his master when he went into his room ; though he kept his side eye fixed on him, and thought he should not so much have minded if he could only have seen him hung instead.

The gibbet would be set up, that was one comfort ; and in the broad stare of daylight, with plenty of company to take off the terror of the

thing, Lucas determined to screw his courage up and have a look at it.

But he had a horror of a dead man, and a man on a gibbet worse than all. He had dreamt of one only the night before, when he thought he saw the corpse let itself down by a long rope and run after him, clanking its chains at his very heels, its head on one side, and its dried bones snapping and crackling as it tried to catch him with its lank, bony fingers ! He had always shut his eyes when he came in sight of a gibbet, and he felt if he were to see this one, set up in all its ugliness, he should dream of him for a month to come, wake up in the middle of the night in a cold sweat, only to find him sitting on his chest grinning and making faces at him.

Lucas gave up the thought with a shudder, and when the gibbet was placed on Hind Head Heath, he told Sally she had better get the wild man to go with her, if go she must, as he had no fancy for it.

Nor had the neighbours neither. They never spoke of it but in whispers, for one of them, when coming from the ale-house, and just as the village clock announced midnight, had seen a white horse tearing over Blackdown Hill, with a skeleton riding on it holding out his broken arm, and

striking at him as with a flail. At first they tried to laugh him out of it and said he must have dreamt it, but the man stuck to it, until by degrees they all believed it too; and when they woke in the night, fancied they heard his shriek as well, and trembled lest the skeleton rider should knock with his broken arm at the door and drag them out of bed to take a ride with him.

As to going over the hill at night, running the risk of meeting him face to face, there was not a man in the place had heart enough to try it. It was not the first spectre they had heard of, and this one was worse than Dick Coombs's ghost a hundred times.

The man was dead, but where were his companions? Lurking about in holes and corners or in their dark and dismal rooms, drawing pictures in their minds of the fatal beam, and of their comrade swaying under it. It might have been their chance, or the least breath of his might have dragged them from their hiding-places to share the fate he had encountered without a murmur or a word. There were three voices raised for him, three deep and earnest prayers offered up, and poor Mike's name was lifted to the skies in penitential tones from lips that

begged forgiveness, and for mercy on him and on themselves.

A deep melancholy had fallen on Blakeborough during the few days following Mike Garroway's death. He was more subdued and gentle than he had been, though the old fire would still break out at times when he heard of further trespass and damage on his land. He would wander in the woods and sit musing by the hour, hardly noticing the passers by, who touched their hats to him with a better grace now than they used to do.

His visits, too, were frequent at the Hall, and he would sit looking at Florence as she sung at her harpsichord with an abstracted gaze until she almost trembled to see him coming up the avenue, or hear him speaking to her father in his room. Twice a day he would sometimes call and sit with the old man, when she would be sent for to sing and talk to them. She had a dread of this at first, but with a little time her hesitation wore away; although his gaze was always fixed on her, and she could never turn her head but he was looking at her with his large melancholy eyes.

They had news at last from Mr. Pritchard. They had been a long time expecting it, but at

length it came. He had brought the old Jew to terms. Clam was ready to sign too, and give up all claim on Martin Blakeborough. The mortgage deed was prepared and the moment it was signed he would pay his friends, the Jew and lawyer, what had been borrowed, and Squire Blakeborough would be his own master once again. He had had a hard tustle for it, but the thing was done, as far as they were concerned at least, and only wanted Mr. Dormer's and the squire's signature to complete the business.

He wrote an amusing description of how Isaacs had hung fire until his last hope had failed him, by the man's dying at Guildford without making a confession. He had lived in hope until the last minute of obtaining, either by threats or promises, some clue to his missing papers; but when the man was really hung they were past recovery, and neither living nor dead, as far as he knew, could throw a light on their discovery.

Old Clam had been more easily managed. He had yielded after the first shot, which had rent a hole in the heart of his case, large enough to sink a more respectable lawyer than he was; but he had had a hard fight of it with the Jew, he wrote, and had to board him before he cried

quarter or would strike his colours. But they had at last both knocked under, and the treaty of peace had only to be signed, the money handed over; when he hoped Mr. Blakeborough would keep his hands out of dirty water for the future.

These were happy tidings, and Martin expressed his sense of the service rendered him in sufficiently warm terms. "Nothing could repay," he said, "the disinterested friendship of Mr. Dormer, to whom he should ever feel as a son should to a father. I only wish," he continued, "so close a relationship could have been established between us."

Mr. Dormer almost began to wish it could himself; he had a longing to rummage all the holes and corners of Chase House, to dive into the cellars and climb into the garrets of an old place like that. *He* could discover—if no one else could—subterranean passages, sliding panels, and secret chambers; and if his daughter were once the mistress of it—there came a cloud with this. His daughter had never been thwarted in her life; she had had everything her own way since her mother died, and left her a mere handful of long clothes; and it was too late in the day to begin crossing her now. She would cry, shut herself in her room, and what should he do

then? Who would look after his comforts, humour his whims, play his fine old English tunes, or understand them half so well as she did? The thing was not to be thought of; but if it could have been, and he could have nursed a young grandson on his knee, heir to a noble place like the squire's, he would have made it a point of honour to take his education into his own hands, and people would soon have seen what would have come of it.

Blakeborough had the same thoughts and inclinations too, only more defined. Partaking less of the romantic and more of the real, he had come to love Florence by only looking at her; and the kindness her father had shown him drew him more closely both to him and to her. There was no sacrifice he would not have made to please her, and he had a latent hope within his mind, that his endeavour to please her might attract her notice, and perhaps secure her affections.

This result, however, he knew could only be brought about by time, and the good it brings. He had to remove the prejudice she had taken against him, and the impression the ill repute he had lived in had made on her. That her affections were engaged, or at least her liking be-

stowed upon Mr. Stapleton, he had an aching fear of. This might have been only his imagination, and instilled into him, for some purposes of his own, by Upton; but if her affections *were* engaged, and the curate her elected choice, how could he, as a matter of conscience, interfere by any pretensions of his own? He had a weighty offence yet to atone for to him, and the first step in his amended life must be by humbling himself, and endeavouring the best he could to right the wrong he had done him.

There was time enough for that. Let him be really quit of Clam and Isaacs; his life was all too brief for the good he meant to do, for the useful years he meant to live.

The time soon came, the mortgage was duly signed, and the release in full of all claims was handed to him from the two usurers, who had hitherto ground him down and held him at their mercy. Now, indeed, he felt an altered man. The very earth grew elastic under his feet; he walked with free and independent steps again—as free and joyous as when his mother lived, and he was sent to college.

He would take the cultivation of his estate into his own hands, repair the damage and neglect it had so long suffered from, build up his

fences, drain his land, keep his homesteads in good order, and ease his tenants' rents. He would have no more seizures, no widow or distressed yeoman should curse him in the midst of houseless children any more; but he would make his name beloved, as his father's had been before him; and by the time his middle life was past, he hoped the prating children would flock about his path, instead of flying from it as they had done, their joyous faces greeting him as he went, and their parents blessing him.

All this was in his mind, but there were injuries to fight against as well as good to do; and while he was anxious to better the condition of the worthy, he determined to check the daring of the vicious. The poachers must be dealt with; they must be put down with a strong hand, and Blakeborough was not afraid to take a leading part in it.

His way led through a wooded dell; here he could speak aloud, and give free utterance to his thoughts. The doubting past was gone, and the bright future shone in all its radiant light before him. There was not a single cloud to dim it, or to cast its shadow over him. He was free from Upton and his less dangerous associates; they were all gone—dispersed or dead.

There came a sudden chill upon him as he spoke the word, and a rustling in the faded leaves came steadily upon his ear, as though the spirit of the executed man walked that forest glade, and dogged his footsteps even in the midst of his highest hopes. All was still again; and as he went along, thinking of the gibbet and poor Mike's red coat, he spoke in whispers only audible to himself, almost fancying Lucas was watching behind the trees, listening to him with all the ears he had.

That was another cause of fear; but the present time lived through, and the outrage forgotten with Garroway's death, he thought how he would turn upon him, how he would have him in his power for sundry thefts he had winked at, of plate and trinkets stolen and treasured in his box. Let but the time arrive when he could damnify his character by what he could prove against him, he would defy the worst that he could do. The fellow's public guilt would disarm his private slander, and he would pounce upon him with a sudden spring, and send him off to justice. That time had not yet come, events were yet too recent; but until it came let him guess on, and listen as he would, he was prepared, and must endure it for a time.

He had reached the far end of a wooded glade, and diving through a sloping dell studded with knots of primroses, bursting like clumps of yellow stars through spongy moss stood looking at them. Attracted by their brightness, and by the variety of hue and colour coming from wild, uncultivated flowers, he stooped to gather a pink orchis bursting from its spotted leaves, when the sharp crack of a gun was heard not many yards behind him. The bullet whistled over him as he stooped, and with a thud buried itself in an aspen stem before him.

The orchis had saved his life; the collar of his coat was split and torn by the bullet flying over his shoulder, but the well-aimed ball had done no further mischief.

He started up, facing his danger like a lion would turn upon his hunter, when he heard a distant crackling of wood, as though a man's foot were rushing through the copse; then all was still again. Following after the retreating sound, he went struggling and breaking through the bushes; but the dense growth of underwood met him at every turn, and stopped his swift and sudden speed. With the eagerness of a hound he retraced his steps, and ran along the devious glade. He could see nothing—no one was in

sight—no one but some ploughmen in the distant fields, guiding the deep-sunk share along the earthy furrow, whistling to their horses, and busy in their morning's toil.

Who could have fired that shot? and with what purpose but to kill? It was well aimed, though foully meant. And Dick Coombs's name rose with a curse to his lips as he went through the glade again, hoping to see him lurking in a covert. He would have sprung at his throat if he had had twenty guns, and each one levelled at him.

"The murderous scoundrel!" he muttered to himself, "I'll teach him to shoot at me, and aim bullets at his master. I'll hunt him out of the hole he lurks in, and hang him—hang him, as they hung poor Mike for not half so bad a job as this."

All his hoping anticipations were forgotten in the first burst of his awakened passions, which had lain dormant for a while only to be roused into added fury. His hands and feet were clenched, while his eyes looked bloodshot with the intensity of fire that glowed within them.

"Murderous and sneaking ruffian!" he cried, when he reached the dell again, and watched the hole the ball had made, "you'll shoot at me, will

you—kill me from behind a tree? I'll play fairer by you when I catch you, and throttle you face to face ; I will, as I am a living man, if I can only lay my hands upon you—I'll teach you what it is to oppose me !”

Clambering his way out of the dell, he walked through the glistening blades of the young corn homewards to Chase House.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE WARREN.

THERE was a stir and bustle in the court-yard all the afternoon ; men were started off on horseback to landed proprietors far and near, and half-a-dozen of his farm men were summoned to be up at the house by ten o'clock at night—the squire wanted them, and they would be well paid for what they did. His gamekeeper and his man were summoned too. Blakeborough shook his fist at them, and called them lazy cowards, dogs, who were not worth their keep. “ But I’ll put end to this, and quickly too. Am I to be shot at, and my land poached over, whilst you skulk in your beds, and never turn out to hunt these fellows off it ? But I’ll hunt *you* off, and quickly too, if this is to last much longer. So load your guns with ball to-night, and try for once if you can shoot at a man instead of a rabbit. Ten o'clock ; do you hear, not a minute later.”

The men slunk away, glad enough to get off

so easily; but the squire had work for them at night, and they must do it too. There was no shirking now; and whether they liked it or not, they must have a brush with the poachers, which hitherto they had not even dreamed of.

Lucas was not of a combative disposition, and trembled in his shoes for fear the squire should order him to go as well; but if he did, he mentally resolved to get behind a tree, as his betters have done before him, and never stir from it while there was fighting going on, or danger to be avoided. But as "out of sight is out of mind," he thought he would retire into the kitchen, and superintend, spite of the laughing of the cook, the new trimming of Sally's cap.

There were more than a dozen men assembled in the stable, when Blakeborough went in among them, as the clock struck ten, and told them of the work he had for them.

"If you behave yourselves like good men, I'll give you a guinea apiece; but if you are going to run away, make up your minds to it at once, I'll have no flinchers with me."

There were young daring fellows among them who laughed at the idea of running away when

there was a guinea to be had by standing fast, and they promised to hold by the young squire, let what would come of it—not a man would go back. The keeper wished *he* could, and would have given a guinea, had he possessed that superabundance of cash, to have remained where he was. But needs must when the squire drove, so he promised to stand fast too.

Three or four extra hands had been sent in by the neighbouring gentry, for the poaching had spread to their lands as well, though the worst damage had always been inflicted on Blakeborough's estate; they had not broken their fences, nor fired their barns as yet, but they might come to it in time, and as prevention was better than cure, they lent a helping hand, in hopes of ridding the county from their further depredations.

They had a natural instinct against poachers in general, and those of their own neighbourhood in particular. A thief or burglar they looked upon as a lamb compared with a prowling fellow who came like a wolf upon their land by night, and made free with their preserves, as though they had as much right to shoot a bird or wire a hare as the best blooded squire of them all. They could imagine nothing more infamous

or more deadly than a man with a gun in his hand, unless properly qualified and licenced to kill game, or requested by invitation to do so by the proprietor.

Each man had his mug of ale served out to him, and by the light of the stable lantern inspected the priming of his gun, or sounded the toughness of his cudgel, then headed by the squire threaded their way through the dark road in a single file towards the Warren.

They had an easy time of it at first, for Blakeborough took them by a roundabout track across the hill to the other side the Warren, which lay to the left of the broken road from Haslemere; but they soon came on rough hilly ground, and had to force their way midst tangled boughs, through dense and unpruned brushwood. The night was dark as pitch, and slipping down the banks, or crossing over gullies, some of them broke their shins, and began cursing in no very measured terms, not only at the badness of the road, but at the job they had come upon.

“Steady, men!” cried Blakeborough; “never mind a graze, so long as there are no broken bones; we shall catch them napping, by the way I have brought you, that’s one comfort.”

“May be,” grumbled one of the men; “I

wish I was napping too, instead of breaking my shins against these grubbed-up roots."

"You'll have all the easier work by and by," said Blakeborough quietly ; "and a smooth way home. So now silence, men, and don't talk ; we shall soon be on them."

Chase Warren lay in a dingle to the left hand of the hilly road, up which the Jew had walked on his way to the squire's house. It was a dismal, out of the way place, where, in times gone by, had stood a homestead, but the ways about it were so rough, and the dips in the land so frequent, it had lain untenanted for years, and at last fallen into decay, as a place unfit for human habitation. The old timbers had dropped from their fastenings, while the rents were stopped with dried furze and clay. There was no casement to it, for the window had been blocked up too, and the unused door hung by a broken hinge slantways to the ground. Neither were there pathways leading to it ; weeds and dock leaves had choked them long ago, and what had once been the garden, was now a tangled mass of thorn and briar. There was no sign of life about the place, and there it stood, a wretched wasted block, unfit for any use, at the bottom of that damp and rocky dell.

They came yet closer to it, as Blakeborough

led them on with cautious steps, forcing aside the matted growth of prickly thorn, of furze, and hazel, stepping stealthily along down broken rocks and marshy earth, ill-drained and sloppy to their tread, until he came in sight of the dark mass of lumbering clay and timber that had once been a habitable dwelling.

Suddenly a speck of light streamed through a crevice in the wall, while a gray smoke, tinged by the blazing fire within, curled through an aperture in the crazy roof. There was no sound, no buzz of voices, or the least stir, to break the deep and silent calm by which the dingle was surrounded. The speck of light still twinkled through the cranny in the wall, but the place appeared untenanted for all that, and without a human soul to break the stillness of that desolate and ruined hovel.

Motioning his men to remain where they were, Blakeborough crept stealthily along, until he gained the crevice in the wall and peeped through it.

The light that had attracted their attention came from what had once been the kitchen of the place, where, round a blazing pile of turf, some half-dozen men were grouped on clumps of wood, or grubbed-up roots, dragged through

the broken doorway of the hut into their midnight haunt.

Creeping back again as noiselessly as he could, Blakeborough joined his followers, and spoke to them in whispered undertones, of what he had seen.

CHAPTER XV.

STOLE AWAY.

THERE was no other light within but what the fire gave, and the peaty smoke hung like a gray vapour over the sitters' heads. The flooring had been torn up or had rotted itself away long since, and the damp clay soil was filled with puddles here and there, where the recent rains had found a channel through the started weather boards; though round the fire the men had made all snug enough, and the hot embers lit their faces up, as they sat circling it, waiting for the time to come when they could venture out and snare the squire's game. A small heap of hares and pheasants was piled in a corner of the hut, and the men's guns rose slanting up between their knees.

Stretched at full length in front of the fire lay Ned Pullen, fast asleep, and snoring heavily; his lurcher nestling by his side, his eyes blinking at the glowing turf, and his nose baking in the hot glare, with a feeling of warmth and comfort he knew how to make the most of.

“Ned’s been at his old tricks to-night,” said one of the men, with a tanned face, and sandy coloured hair, nudging his companion at his elbow, and pointing to the sleeping figure on the ground. “He’s al’ays at it, and never knows when he’s had enough; and now he’s half drunk, he’ll be up to some devil’s trick or other, no one knows the end on. Poaching’s all fair enough—poor men must live, as doesn’t like to work at low wages, but burning ricks is another thing. It’ll put a rope round our necks some of these days, and bring the whole county on our heels. I don’t like it for one.”

“Nor I, neither,” said the man he had spoken to, who had an ugly scar across his face, that by no means improved his personal appearance, independent of the additional beauty he had acquired by being deeply pitted with the small pox, and with the bridge of his nose flattened like a prize fighter’s.

Speaking in a half-whisper to his mate, and lighting a short pipe, the man went on, “It’s not to my mind, I can tell you, ’specially when there’s nothing to be got by it. But that’s Dick’s doings, and he sets Ned on to lend a helping hand. He owes the squire a good turn, and isn’t to be put off doing it neither. But there’s

the dog cocking it's ears, he's not far off I take it then."

The man smoked on, while tramping towards the hovel came a heavy footstep. The dog pricked his ears, and commenced wagging his stump of a tail by way of welcome to the new comer, but without disturbing himself any further. After one or two attempts he got his head and stump settled to his mind, closed his eyes, and went to sleep.

With his gun over his shoulder, Dick Coombs walked into the midst of the group, and stood shading his eyes with his hand from the sudden light that almost blinded him, then unslinging a small keg he carried across the barrel of his gun, laid it on a log of wood, huddled himself up in a corner by the fire, and sat looking at it without speaking a word.

"What's up now, Dick?" said the man with the sandy hair, after a long pull at the keg, which he handed to his neighbour when he had finished, "you look as comfortable as though you had missed with both barrels."

"All's one for that," replied Dick; "we can't have luck al'ays with two or with one barrel; balls won't go straight when you want 'em, do what you will sometimes."

He said no more, but sat looking at his gun,

balancing it in his hand, and squinting along the barrel, then resting the butt end on the ground, grasped it with both hands, and sat leaning on it.

"Ain't it time to wake Ned?" queried a man with an idle, dogged look about him, whose appearance denoted a sort of half-breed between a shopkeeper and a ploughman, and who, to judge from his face and lazy movements, was willing enough to poach and steal, but not over inclined to work for his living. "The moon will be well up, and if we get a good sack full, I knows the chap as will take it out and out, and give us a paying price too. He makes a business of it, and knows where to stow all we can get, and more too. All's fish that comes to his net, from a buck to a rabbit."

"What'll he give me if I shoots 'un next time?" asked Dick, still leaning on his gun, and speaking in a sort of reverie. "What'll he give me, I say, if I shoots 'un next time? Doesn't follow 'cos I missed 'un once I shall twice."

"What's in the wind now, Dick? and who are you speaking on; a hare or a pheasant? Them's the only things I know on worth shooting at," replied the man who had last spoken.

"May be, and may not be," said Dick. "But what's a hare or a pheasant to a man who has

hurt you? That's the game I'd like to shoot at, and I'll bring it down next time mayhap. I wish I know'd a gun as 'ud do it. This one's getting above its work, I think, and not inclined to do as you would have 'un. There he was with his back to me, as clean a mark as a hare on her form, and I'd have shot 'un through his black unfeelin' heart, but, somehow or other, gun wouldn't carry straight, and I missed 'un."

And all the time Dick sat leaning on the barrel, and speaking as in a dream.

"You don't mean to say you shot at the squire, Dick?" cried the man with the broken nose and pock-marked face, while the rest of the sitters turned about and looked at Coombs.

"Yes, but I does, though; shot at 'un and missed 'un, more's the pity! And why not, I should like to know? He's torn my heart, worse nor a bullet would tear his, and thinks nothin' on't. If I had only kept my eyes on his face, I'd have done it fast enough. I tried it once, but somehow or other, I couldn't pull the trigger, for Nell kept peeping out of the bushes at me, and when she was gone, his back was to me, and I missed 'un."

"A good job too! Do you want the whole shire on us, going about murdering men in that

way? 'Twont do, Dick, and if you try it again, I'm off with you that's all."

"Can't be helped," said Dick, without altering his position; "I must work by myself then."

"Work for a madman, as you are, and all because the squire was fond of a wench, and yours came in for the luck of it," replied the sandy haired man, rather angrily.

Dick turned and looked at the speaker, his pale, woe-begone face became paler still, and his lips quivered. He looked at him for some time, and then said, calmly and slowly—

"Stop till you have a child stolen from you, disgraced and ruined by a man like this, you wont talk as you do now; you'll know better, you'll feel more like a man and less like a coward."

Dick's lips began to foam, while the veins upon his forehead rose like knotted cords, and he clenched his hands over the barrel of his gun with all his strength. The man started to his feet, and a struggle might have come of it, had not the others placed themselves between them, and pushed Dick down in his corner.

"Sit down, I tell 'ee—sit down, and don't talk o' killing squire any more, as if he were a rabbit or a stoat. None o' us will go with you in it, Dick; and what's more," said his friend with

the flattened nose, "we'll have no more barns fired; we are only twisting halters for ourselves. If you're a mind to that sort of fun, try it by yourself, and welcome, but we'll have no hand in it. Six men are better than one any day in the week, and while you work with us, you must do as we do, or take the consequences, and not be flying out in the way you does, when you're told on't. There, sit down, I tell 'ee, do as you're told, and don't make no fuss about it."

Thus persuaded, Dick sat in his corner once again, and took no further notice. He still leant upon his gun, and every now and then his hands were passed across his eyes, wiping the tears away that trickled down his cheeks. He never turned to look at them again, nor speak to them, but, huddled in his corner, sat abstracted and apart.

Yawning and stretching upon the floor, Ned Pullen opened his eyes, and, rousing from his drunken stupor, began to stare about him. His first sign of returning animation was a kick bestowed upon his dog, who had waked up as well, and stood, wagging his stump of a tail, within reach of his foot. The lurcher gave a sharp howl, then slunk into a corner, where he sat looking at his master, watching for the time to come when he might venture near him.

Ned lifted himself upon his elbow, and by degrees raised his ponderous bulk, then sat upright upon a block of wood, rubbing his eyes and yawning fearfully. No sooner had he brought himself into a poise than the lurcher left off scraping a half-circle on the ground with his bony stump, nestled himself at his master's foot, but with one eye well upon him, and appeared quite contented and resigned.

"What's o'clock?" asked Pullen, in a thick, husky voice.

"Twelve, or hard upon it, and time we were starting," said the idle-looking fellow who had promised a good market for the game they were to kill. "There are plenty of snares set; and if the moon's well up, we shall knock lots of pheasants off their perches, and no fear of interruption either. Only give the squire's gamekeeper plenty to drink, and a half-crown now and then, he's deaf as a beetle, and can't hear a gun fire nohow."

"Oh! hang him, and the likes o' him," cried Ned, with a half-drunken hiccup. "The whole lot on 'em's a bad breed. There ain't no gamekeeper as I knows on I couldn't chuck over my back like a sack o' meal, and pitch in a horse-pond for a pint o' ale. Haven't you got no stuff to drink? I'm as dry as chaff."

“Steady, Ned!” cried one of the men, while Pullen swilled at the bung-hole of the keg. “You must keep your legs to-night; and how do you expect it if you drink in that way? Give over, will you!”

“Hold your tongue, and don’t stop a man’s drinking till he’s had his fill. Good ale hurts no man, except milksops who’s got no heads to ’em. It never hurt me yet, nor likely to. I’ve tried it too often.”

“I tell you what it’ll do, Ned,” cried the provision-merchant. “If you keep sucking at it in that way much longer, you’ll spoil us all some of these nights, or tumble down in the midst of the snares—and a pretty piece of goods you’ll be to trot away with. You might as soon try to lift an elephant as drunken Ned.”

There was a boisterous laugh at the idea of this lifting process being put in operation, while Ned rolled on his seat, and his flushed face looked red and angry.

He was easily put out of his way when half drunk, and he spoke as though he were put out now.

“None of your jaw, or you may get a crack on it as you wont like. I ain’t to be put on, mind that; and if you try it much further you’ll

find it out. You're not so good a man as I am, and you knows it too. I should like to see the chap as said he was; I'd take it out of him afore I'd done with him. So now you knows my mind. If you don't like it, say so. Ned Pullen's your man."

"Why, you're big enough to eat him, Ned," interposed the man with the broken nose. "But you're always a bullying when you've had too much."

"It's a lie!" roared Pullen, half staggering from his seat. "You knows it's a lie! and I'll stuff it down your throat with my fist if you try it again. If you want to fight, fight like a man, and don't stand nagging there at a better one than yourself."

But the man did not want to fight. He knew Ned of old, and his nose gave him a twinge by way of recollection of what he could do. Drunk or sober, no one had a chance with him, or it would have been attempted long ago. The half-drunken bully balanced himself on his log again, and had the field all to himself. The man swallowed the lie, and Ned Pullen swallowed some more ale.

The men sat sulkily round the table in presence of their stalwart companion, each with 'a

sense of annoyance about him, and longing for the time to come when some unknown champion would come from neighbouring parts and take the shine out of him. He was, however, too good a man to be dispensed with in the work they had to do, and, once in a field or in a copse, the most knowing poacher of them all, and could stand his ground against any four that could be brought against him. They had all a dread of him, and there was not a keeper would meet Ned Pullen in his rounds if he could help it; for he would slash, maim, and kill when once the blood got in his head, and the drink was there as well. He would fight better then than ever, and the half-drunken bully became a formidable gladiator when set upon or opposed. No one had had the courage to try his hand on him but Dick Coombs, and much he got by it. Some thought he had never quite got over the broken head he gave him. He was not half the man he had been, but would sit looking in the fire, and talk, without being spoken to, in a half dream, as he had done just now.

Ned Pullen sat with a dull, heavy frown upon his brow; while his dog, who had curled himself up between his legs, pricked his ears, darted his eyes towards the doorway, and gave a low growl.

“What’s the matter with the dog?” said one of the men, breaking the sulky pause which had lasted some minutes. “What’s he got in his head now?”

“Quiet, you cur! or I’ll give you something to growl for,” cried Ned, stooping down and looking at the dog between his legs. “Can’t you be quiet when you’re well off, and no one’s a touchin’ on you?”

The dog gave a still louder growl; then, starting up, flew towards the door, commenced showing his teeth, and barking savagely.

“There’s something up,” cried Ned, shaking himself together, bringing his brawny figure well into play, striding over the logs, and walking to the door of the hut; while the dog ran out before him into the wasted garden, and set up a loud howl, yelling and barking with all his might.

There was nothing to be seen, though the moon was up, but drooping larch, firs, and birch trees, crowning the steep banks on either side the dell, their delicate tracery well defined and motionless in the still night air.

“The dog has been dreaming,” said Ned to the two men who had followed him to the doorway. “He’s not over apt to give mouth on a false scent, neither. Someone’s been dogging

us, or a gipsy's out on the prowl, perhaps. I don't see nothing ; do you, Tom ?”

Pullen was wide awake enough now. The sudden excitement had driven the fumes of liquor off. But his legs were unsteady although his head was clear, and he would have tumbled head-long had they not caught him by the arms, and held the burly giant up as he went swaying and floundering into the hut again.

“ What's in the wind ?” asked the cautious purveyor, who had kept his seat while the others had gone to see what had startled the dog. “ Are the rabbits peeping out of their burrows, or has a mouse scratched a hole in the thatch ?”

“ Go and look,” roared Pullen. “ If there's anything to be afeard on, you're the one to find it out. You thinks on nothin' but sellin' and buyin' and would lie under a tree all night while others was doing the work, that's what you would, and no mistake. You're more fit to cheat in a chandler's shop, than stand up like a man.”

The dog was not so easily silenced as the provision merchant, but stood with his head stretched out uttering subdued growls, and barking at the broken doorway. They whistled to him but he would not come, but went snuffling about the marshy ground outside.

Ned took a parting draught at the keg, the men picked up their guns and nets and were preparing to leave the hut, when the dog was heard outside barking with might and main, then set up a loud howl and rushed into the hut again, as if to call them out to help.

The men saw there was mischief in it now, and sallying from the doorway met the squire and his men face to face.

The attack was so sudden the poachers were dismayed by the overwhelming force brought against them. But Pullen did not mind a bit. He clubbed his gun and shouted in a voice like thunder to them, "to stand fast, and see how he'd clear a way through the sneaks."

There were a dozen guns pointed at him, but the squire's voice was heard over all the din crying, "Don't shoot him, knock him down, hold your fire till the last."

A general rush took place, men fell fighting and scrambling to the ground, shots were fired, and stout sticks were broken warding blows or breaking one another's heads. Ned Pullen towered above them all, and standing in the midst, dealt his blows heavily and savagely about him. They tried to grapple with him but he flung them off, or with his iron fist laid them bleeding at his feet.

Three of the poachers only stood by Pullen. The provision dealer and another man had bolted when they saw the odds they had to contend against, and breaking their way out of the side of the hut, went skulking home to bed. But Pullen and the others stood at bay standing back to back, fighting their way through the midst of their assailants, and would have got clean off had not Blakeborough darted at the giant's throat, and keeping well within his guard, struggled and grappled with him man to man. His blood was up, and when it was let no one come within his swoop.

Almost as tall but not so bulky or so strongly built as Pullen, Blakeborough's sinewy strength and reckless daring made him a match almost for the brutal ruffian he had singled out, to try his power against. He saw how the men hung back at the very sight of Ned, how they fell away before his blows as he went on clearing a space of a couple of yards or more about him, slashing with his fist, or maiming and felling with the butt end of his gun all who opposed him. Hurling himself headlong upon him and with his knuckles pressed into his bull-like neck, the two men struggled, and knit their arms about each other, grasping and tearing for their very lives.

The moment Ned Pullen had been brought to bay the squire's people made short work of the others, who were soon knocked on the head, thrown down, and overpowered. But Pullen was still upon his legs, and like a practised wrestler linked his arms round Blakeborough, got the grip on him, and in another moment would have dashed him down, or with one of his terrific blows have laid him at his feet, when one of the squire's followers, who had been hurt in the beginning of the fray, set his knee into the middle of his back, and with a sudden jerk at the collar of his coat pulled him backwards. Shipping in the dabbled clay the brawny ruffian toppled over and fell prostrate, while the others fastened his arms and legs with cords, they had brought with them for the purpose, and prevented his doing further mischief; though he still fought plunging his fists and heels at them, struggling as he lay, and fighting on the ground.

Had he kept on his legs another minute, he would have had no squire to contend with. Ned would have been in the woods, his hands unbound, and his feet free to go wherever he pleased.

The poachers had left Dick Coombs sitting in the hut in a half-dream beside the fire. He had not heard the dog bark, nor seen the busy motion

it occasioned. Startled at length from his reverie by a shot fired on the outside, and the cries of the fighting men, he was rushing into the midst to take his part with the rest, when he saw Pullen fighting and struggling with a tall man, who looked like the squire. His knuckles were in Pullen's throat, while his face thrown back was black and swollen. But there was another face as well, and the moon shone on that too. Now, then, he could strike him to his feet, tear his heart out if he liked, and see what it was made of. His gun was raised and sweeping down glanced from Blakeborough's shoulder, striking in its descending vengeance on the ground, breaking the stock short off, and leaving him with the barrel only in his hand.

Blakeborough had fallen as the blow was aimed, dragged down by Pullen. The barrel was still in Dick's hand, and that could brain him if the stock had not. In the act of striking, Dick's arms were seized from behind, himself thrown down, bound and secured, when, like the others, he was carried into the hut, and laid side by side with Pullen on the ground.

And all that night they laid, watched over by the squire's men. He had brought them by a rough road to the back of the hut, and had come

upon the poachers by surprise. Had the dog not scented them, they would have taken the whole gang of them almost without a blow.

The dog had had his share in the fight as well—had bit and torn at Blakeborough's legs all the time he struggled with his master, by whose side he now laid, licking the blood trickling from his gashed and wounded head, whining over him, and resting his nose upon his breast.

The men were left to watch and guard all night, with order to shoot the prisoners down if they made any further struggle, and march them off to Petworth in the morning. Two of the fellows had escaped; but Pullen, Dick Coombs, and the rest were safe—that was a comfort; and there would be no more poaching or burning on the squire's land.

Blakeborough was bruised and breathless; but he had held his own against Pullen, and would against any man if he were once thwarted, or put himself in opposition to him. He had caught them with one throw of the net; and that murderous ruffian, Coombs, was taken as well. He'd teach him to burn his cottage down and fire his barns. He did not mind the blow he had received, although his shoulder was contused and swollen, and his arm stiff and painful, and he

had to suspend it with a handkerchief fastened round his neck.

The squire, and one of the men who was badly hurt, went home. The rest sat up all night, with their guns ready cocked, and swore they'd shoot every man of them if they dared so much as to wag a finger. Ned Pullen was asleep. His thick, muscular limbs were strongly bound, and knotted round with cords. His companions were bound as well; and while some of the keepers watched, the others slept—and so, sleeping or watching by turns, they passed the night.

The morning came at last, and as its light streamed through the crannies in the roof, or between the started timbers of the hovel, the men looked at their prisoners, and counted them one by one.

Where was Dick Coombs? He was there the overnight, and now he was not among them. Had he hidden himself in a corner? No! he was not in the hut, nor lurking on the outside. They searched where he had lain, and found the cords he had been bound with cut and lying upon the ground. He must have slipped one of his hands out, and with his knife cut through the fastenings; then, forcing a started plank, had slipped away, unseen and noiselessly, through the

aperture. Had they dozed upon their watch, and, with their guns all ready, let him steal away?

They *had* nodded, and Dick Coombs had stolen away.

CHAPTER XVI.

RESOLUTIONS.

THE hue and cry after Dick Coombs spread far and wide. Rewards were offered for his apprehension ; parties of men hunted the woods and the surrounding country in hopes of finding him, but to no use. He had escaped, but the rest of the poachers had been carried off to Petworth, to be dealt with according to law, submitting with the best grace they could, when they saw they had no choice in the matter. But Pullen was not so easily managed. He fought, struggled, and had to be strapped at the bottom of a cart before they could carry him to jail, where he was heavily ironed, and kept in a cell by himself.

He had no ale to get drunk upon now, though he kept calling for it, and swore he would not touch a bit of food unless he had it. And there he lay, like a wild beast in its den, sulking upon his straw.

The jailer placed a loaf of bread and a pitcher

of water by his side, and, locking him in, told him, "He might like it or lump it, if it came to that—it made no odds to him, and he did not intend it should."

But Ned thought he could never be brought to eat bread and drink water. All that day he never touched them; but hunger fell upon him in the night, and, when the man entered his cell in the morning, he saw him munching the dry bread, and picking up the crumbs that had fallen upon the ground. His pitcher was empty; he had had nothing else to assuage the burning thirst that almost drove him mad, and so he drank it.

"Water's not ale, worse luck!" he said, "but if it can't be got at, I must make up my mind to it. If I only had my hands free, I'd knock the magistrates' heads together, for cheating a man in the way they does out of his nat'ral drink."

His wife was the only person who went to see him, and walked all the way to Petworth to carry him clean linen; but he only swore at her, said she came to mock him, and threatened to do her a mischief if she showed her face near him any more.

"What do you mean," he cried, "comin' a preachin' and a talkin' of what I *ought to do*?"

I'll do as I like. Ned Pullen's a man, and not a milksop as will stand a wife's naggin' at him; and what's more, I don't want any of your religious jabberin'. It's all stuff, and the whole lot of it's not worth a pint o' ale. I only wish I'd got a gallon of it now; I'd pretty soo drink it up."

There was no talking to him. He would not listen to what she said, but drove her from the place by his foul language and brutal treatment, to walk her footsore, weary way again—sobbing and weeping as though her heart would break.

The prison-gates were closed, but neither threats nor blows could drive his dog away. He had followed the cart all the way to Petworth, trying to leap into it and sit beside his master; and when the gates were shut, and he was left on the outside, the old lurcher sat barking and scratching at it, trying to get in.

There were peaceful nights and slumbers now. The gamekeeper went his rounds without the fear of Ned Pullen in his eyes. There were no more ricks fired; the outhouses were safe from further damage; the pheasants rested in their covert; the preserves were not startled by midnight shots; the squire's land was free, at last,

from poachers, and even Lucas slept in peace, and never saw the yellow eyes staring upon him from the window as he lay in bed.

All things were quieted into a gentle current once again. The restless mind of Blakeborough grew calm, and gentle too. He attended carefully to his estate, and his name bid fair to be made welcome by his kind and useful acts, his constant study to do good. The recollection of his former life was passing away; children came about his knees and parents blessed him, as he stood laughing in the midst of chubby-cheeked, fair-haired scramblers after apples, pence, or sweetmeats.

But he had much to do before he could reconcile himself to his new feelings, or efface the memory of the past. He had a grievous wrong yet to atone for; and though his pride might be humbled by it, humbled it must be before he could be at peace with conscience. The natural good of his disposition broke through the in-temperate bad—for bad and good were nicely balanced in him—and like a gleam of sunshine, lit all his actions with hoping promise. His passions now were kept in check, and in the peaceful country life he led he soon forgot the storm and whirl of London, the dissipations by

which it was surrounded. He could look back upon it now without regret for its pleasures, or longing for its excitement. Its weakness and its vices, however, were present to him still, and he recalled the time with painful sorrow when he had been tempted through its follies into crime—that time, when he had followed in his blinded youth, the guiding hand of him who had led him on through shallow faults to deepest degradation. All this had yet to be accounted for, acknowledged, and made good; and he had brought himself, after some struggle with his proud and irritable self, to make the best and fullest reparation in his power.

Nic Upton was not there to tempt him now; his passions had had their full play in his late encounter with the poachers, and once again the gentle character of the man peeped forth—timidly at first, perhaps—startled and abashed by the very sense of his own weakness, until at last the least kind word would have tempted him to fling himself upon the breast of the man he had wronged, and, like a spoiled and wilful child, ask pardon for the fault he had committed. His mother's nature was in him still in all he did; and had that mother lived to see him now, she would have forgiven him all the pain he had

occasioned her, and looking on him with her loving eyes, had blessed him in his repentance, and urged him on to greater good.

As a first step towards the reformation he so fully promised himself to achieve, he resolved to seek out Mr. Stapleton, and whatever the pang it caused him, come to an understanding and explanation with him.

He had met him constantly of late up at the Hall, but a constrained and awkward silence had fallen upon each at sight of the other. Florence was painfully alive to this, and put it down in her own mind to the most womanly reason she could suggest—a sense of rivalry and a jealousy arising from affection for herself. She was a little vain, but it was a natural and therefore pardonable vanity. She had observed the growing friendship between her father and the squire with alarm, and his frequent visits to the Hall, with doubting and suspicion. Could it be that Blakeborough still cherished the hopes of winning her affections, and pursued her, notwithstanding the refusal of his offer? She certainly disliked him less than she used to do; he was gentler in his manners, and every day grew more and more into her liking. He was certainly not bad hearted, and now he had thrown off his

London companions might reform ; she hoped so for the sake of his dependants, and a little for himself perhaps.

Her father never looked half so pleased as when he was there. The squire was bent on improving his estate ; and with the authorities Mr. Dormer could help him to, he would make a good job of it in the long run, if he only followed his advice, and studied farming on fine old English principles. There was not an estate in the county would have a chance with him ; his crops would be heavier, his land yield double, and every ewe drop couples. He had hit upon a book at last that told them all about it ; it was worth its weight in gold to any man who was not a slave to his prejudices, " which, thank Heaven, I am not," said Mr. Dormer, with a proud sense of superiority. There it lay, spread open on the table, waiting the squire's arrival ; and what a morning's work they would have spelling through the old English, with Florence every now and then to help them to make it out.

" It is astonishing what sharp eyes that girl has," he said to Mr. Stapleton, " and after I have been floundering for an hour or more she puts her needle on a word, and pricks a meaning out of it I should never have guessed at, nor the squire

neither; he's as pig-headed as I am, and always wants Florence by his side to spell his lesson for him. But this book is as easy as a primer, and the 'Five Hundred Points of Good Husbandry' will set us on our legs again. Old Tom Tusser shall be our oracle, and where will you find one like him in these times I should like to know?"

With his spectacles pushed back over his forehead, his slippers down at heel, and his hands dived into the pockets of his dressing-gown, old Mr. Dormer walked up and down the avenue, waiting for Blakeborough. He was longing to show him the "Five Hundred Points of Good Husbandry;" and if Martin did not come at once, he resolved to put the book under his arm, and walk over in his slippers to show him the treasure he had found.

Mr. Stapleton opened the lodge gate, and walking towards him, wished him good morning, and said, "Miss Florence is well, I hope?"

"Oh yes!" replied Mr. Dormer, rather testily, pushing his spectacles off his nose again, where he had let them fall, to take a better view of the new comer. "She's well enough; girls are always well enough when they have everything their own way, and she has hers to her heart's

content; her poor father can't call his life his own. She has done nothing but scold me for the last half-hour because I am out here in my slippers, with only my velvet cap upon my head. The ancient Britons never wore shoes at all, and who ever heard of their catching cold? Fresh morning air is better than a dose of physic any time. With his lungs full of it, a man lives twice as long, and grows twice as strong too. That's what all the old doctors and chirurgeons say. But you don't understand these things, Mr. Stapleton, you have no taste for ancient knowledge," continued Mr. Dormer, opening his mouth, gulping and swallowing as much fresh air as he possibly could; then throwing his arms back to "open his chest," as he said, stood at the end of the avenue waiting for the squire.

Stapleton passed by him with an ill-concealed smile, and meeting Florence at the doorway of the Hall, walked with her into the house.

The curate's face was paler than usual, and there was a pained expression in it as he sat looking at Florence, who was too intently occupied with her embroidery even to notice it. After a constrained silence of a few minutes, he said—

"I am afraid Miss Dormer, my visits here are not so welcome as I could wish."

"Indeed!" replied Florence, a sudden colour mounting to her cheeks. "What makes you think so?"

"Many things, small and insignificant in themselves perhaps, but they have nevertheless led to the conclusion I have arrived at. Your father——"

"He is still in the garden, and I must call him in," interrupted Florence, half rising from her chair, with an evident desire of avoiding any further conversation.

"Pray listen to me, Miss Dormer. You know your father's notions, and any endeavour on your part to persuade him indoors, will only strengthen him in his determination to keep outside. Just now—if you will pardon my saying so—I could wish him to remain there, only for a few minutes, I shall not detain you longer."

"What can you mean? and what can have happened to cause this sudden change in you?" said Florence, resuming her seat with a certain hesitancy and reluctance.

"I have promised not to detain you long, I will endeavour to be as good as my word. I have no right to trespass on your time, you have no

doubt many uses for it, but I have long wished to speak with you alone, and take the opportunity of your father's absence to do so now."

"Something has annoyed you, I see, although I am at a loss to guess what it is."

"It is nothing but what I must submit to—I have a right to submit to it, and have no reason to complain. I have met with so much kindness and indulgence under this roof, I should be ungrateful were I to complain of anything."

"You *have* something to complain of then," interrupted Florence. "If you will let me know what it is, I will endeavour to amend it."

"It is not for you to do, Miss Dormer. You have a father to consult, a father's wishes to consider. I will not attempt to conceal from you—it would be folly now to do so—the perfect happiness I have always felt in your father's society, and in yours. You must be sensible of this, by my frequent visits, and the delight your company always brings to those who know and love you—for every one who knows, loves Florence Dormer."

The girl blushed. She was not displeased at the curate's words, but for all that she wished he had not spoken them. She felt there was some-

thing yet to come, and that something she would rather should be left unsaid.

“Your constant seeking to do good, Miss Dormer, has found its own reward—your gentle teaching the best of payment, for your praise is never silent. The sick and the unhappy are for ever sounding it. You have ministered to their wants—have sat and watched by them in fever and in pain, and their ascending prayers have winged your praise to heaven. Go where I will, that prayer is always raised, and can you wonder, then, that people love you?”

“These are small things,” said Florence, with her eyes cast upon the ground. “The poor are brought to love us at a very little cost, if we would only take the pains. The praise belongs, of right, to my father, it is through his hand I help, not my own.”

“What blesses you I hope may still bless him,” replied the curate, with solemn earnestness; “he is a worthy man, you love him as a daughter should. It is your duty to conform to all his wishes. It is your duty, perhaps your inclination.”

“Oh, yes!” cried Florence, relieved from a feeling of suspense. The curate was praising her father now, and she could talk without hesitation once again.

"I have no right to interfere where inclination and duty go hand in hand," he said; "still less right have I to question the preference you have shown. I speak plainly, not to offend, but make myself understood."

Florence either did not, or would not, understand him now, but sat waiting for the explanation yet to come. Her womanly instinct led her to guess one half of what he would say; the other she was not so sure of.

"When I was first permitted to speak to you in confidence, Miss Dormer, I told you of sad trials and misfortunes which had fallen to the lot of one, who once lived in a house that was so like your own. You have forgotten it, perhaps?" said Mr. Stapleton, with a searching glance at Florence.

"On the contrary, I have often thought of it," she replied, "and sometimes fancied it must have been yourself you spoke of. It must have been, by the earnest way in which you told it."

"As far as struggles yet to come applied, it might have been myself, or any one who had to struggle and endure as I have. I drew the picture of a man so placed, and ask you now, what right has one, so reckless of the peace of others, to hope for peace himself?"

"He was more sinned against than sinning," answered Florence, willing to assuage the pain of that remorse the curate spoke of. She would have quieted, if possible, his doubting thoughts, and harmonized the jarring chords that jangled now, and were so out of tune.

"He sinned, and must endure the penance. He has no right to hope or even dream of such a sudden happiness as I have sometimes dared to hope and dream of. Reflected in your mind I see the image of that near approach to perfect happiness. I see it rise before me, when I look at you, and sinking back upon my worthless self, admire, but dare not venture to approach by one step nearer to it, or if at any time I have so ventured, and so hoped, where I had no right to hope, it is only myself I have to blame, not you."

Florence looked towards the door, wishing, yet fearing her father should come in. She had hoped herself, and sometimes wished for this conversation to come, and she saw no reason why *he* should fear to hope as he did.

"I have trusted myself," he went on to say, "too near to that bright light which shines through you, and like a poor moth, have burnt my summer wings. But darkness has come to me, as it must come to me again, only the more

painfully, that is all. I could perhaps wish I had not indulged in hope. I could have endured better as I was."

The curate drooped his head, and with a deep sigh remained silent. Florence was silent too, but the tell-tale tears trickled down her cheeks, and so she sat.

"I had no right to speak in the way I have, much less to pain you as I see I have." He had spoken plainly, too plainly to be misunderstood. It was now too late to call what he had spoken back, and he determined to make an end of it. "There is not a single pain, or grief, should come to you if I could help it," he continued, mournfully. "You are not fit to endure as I am, to have remorse and pain for ever by you, and yet dare not complain. It is the knowledge of injury inflicted by ourselves, that makes us patient under wrong."

Still the tears came trickling down, and still Florence did not reply.

"To say I have hung about your presence, watched you as a gentle monitor, whose bright and holy life set off my darkness in still stronger contrast, would not offend; and I *have* so watched, I have so hung about you, until from watching I was led to love, although I knew

how hopeless that love was ! I feel it hopeless still."

" Mr. Stapleton !" Florence nerved herself at last to speak. " You are unjust not only to yourself but me, and I should become a party to that injustice, if I heard you censure or find fault with yourself again without replying. I ought not to say it, perhaps, though you force me to it by your disparagement of yourself, but in my eyes you never had the fault you speak of. You have been uniformly just, and unfailing in your duties. The good you have done, and the virtuous life you lead, have made you beloved, respected. My father loves you, I am sure, and I——"

" Respect me. It is more than I deserve, almost more than I had dared to hope for ; and if your father had but loved me, as you say he does, I should perhaps have seen a glimmer of that light, I hoped to bask in. But you are mistaken, Florence. Pardon me if I am too familiar, but a brother, you know, can call his sister by her name, whatever interferes to stop a dearer tie between us. Your father loved me once, at all events he might have loved me, and I had hoped he would. But there has come a change on him of late ; other influences have stepped between us ; his new favourite is now

all in all—the poor curate is forgotten. Squire Blakeborough engrosses all his thoughts, and everything points to his union with you.”

“ With me !” cried Florence, startled by the suddenness of the suggestion. She had had a doubt of this for some time in her mind, but hearing her own thoughts shaped into words by some one else, frightened her.

“ It was of this I wished to speak with you, and to inform you of my determination not to let my vain and inconsiderate pretensions stand in your way, provided your liking still followed where your father loved. It would be ungrateful of me, it would be unjust.”

“ You are unkind for the first time now,” said Florence. “ I am not sure you are not cruel. Why have spoken at all, to speak at last as you do now ?”

“ I would wish to have been silent if I could, and now I have pained you, I would give anything if I *had* been silent. I have struggled against myself, have sat for hours reasoning with myself, but to no use, and at the last have brought myself to speak to you as I have done. However poor my worship, you will not refuse the offer of my prayer : you will not despise me for my truth, however much you may censure my temerity.”

Florence was silent for a few moments. Then raising her eyes to the curate, she said, "What makes you think my father is so fixed on what you say?"

"A thousand circumstances, though none of them sufficiently defined to be instanced as a reason. He looks upon me with different eyes from what he used to do. He is testy and abrupt with me, and sees me speak to you with a displeased expression. He is different with Mr. Blakeborough, who humours him for some wise purpose of his own, sits with him for hours, or forces his company upon you, and speculates on the idea of seeing you the squire's lady. His attentions to you are marked and unmistakable, and pardon me if I say you do not seem so disinclined to receive them as you did at first."

"I know him better than I did, and like him better than I did."

"It was of that I wished to speak," said the curate, with a jealous touch of pain. "It is because you know him better, you like him better, and may therefore come to love him." There was a heaving struggle in his breast as he said the words, but he went on slowly and calmly again, as though his resolution had been taken, and he would finish what he had to say at any cost.

“Your father wishes it, and—now you know him better—you may wish it too. Should this be so, you will learn at least he was not single in his love, but that another loved you too as passionately, as fondly, perhaps more truly; for he gave up all his hopes to yours, all his aspirations and fondest wishes, for your sake alone.”

He left off speaking with dim eyes and faltering voice. Florence's eyes were dimmed as well, but she dried them quickly, then with a smile held out her hand to him, as she said, “My father never persuaded me in his life to that which I objected to—I am sure he never will. I must first learn to love Squire Blakeborough before I marry him. I shall never love him—I will never marry him.”

The curate kissed her offered hand, nor did she try to take it from his passionate grasp. With a brightened countenance and elated thoughts he gathered fresher hopes from the words she had uttered and quite forgot the resolution he had formed of resigning her to another, or of banishing himself from her sight.

CHAPTER XVII.

LAI'D BY THE HEELS.

STRETCHED under the canopy of his cherished Elizabethan bedstead, prostrate by an unmistakable cold in his head—the result of slippers down at heel, and an over dose of the fresh air he so much gloried in—old Mr. Dormer lay feverish and forlorn! Tapioca, sago, gruel, broth, and the variety of slops dedicated to sickness and the cure of colds, had been tried and tried again, but without the satisfactory result sought for and desired, while a flannel night-cap supplied the place of a tufted helmet, and white wine whey grew insolent and vain, filling the measure of his uncomfot up, instead of prime October, or equally potent and consoling, strong March, beer; a soft and downy bed spreading beneath his aching limbs instead of heather, such as ancient Dane or Briton had never dreamed of, or would have consented to repose upon. And there this fine old cultivator of Saxon times and Saxon man-

ners reclined as helpless as a child, and quite as troublesome; coerced into compliance with such recipes as the book of "Family Medicine" laid down to be unfailing in all diseases, past, present, and to come, and supposed to be of equal efficacy whatever the complaint and whatever the receipt, when it had once made up its mind to do its cruel will.

Not to show an undue partiality, or give the one a preference over the other, they had each their turns alike, and as fast as one had failed another had been dug out of the pages of the never-failing and always-to-be-cherished volume, until at last the old housekeeper gave it up in despair, and vowed there was something wrong; something impossible, and not to be attempted in her master's sickness, or the "Family Medicine" must have settled the question long ago—settled it as it had always settled such things before, and left the patient no choice in the matter, but either to get well or die an unbeliever, and give up the ghost accordingly.

At last, quite as a secondary consideration, and after the family save-all had done its worst, the housekeeper succumbed to reason, to say nothing of the imperative orders of Florence, who had manifested her scepticism from the first

by pooh-poohing, much to the horror of the good old dame, who entertained a powerful belief in all the "Family Medicine" said, or insisted on doing, and if it did not do as well as it could wish, whose fault was that? Certainly not the book's, which could have done twice as much with anyone else,—but Mr. Dormer—"Well, send for the doctor, miss; but mind, I wash my hands of him."

And well was it that she did; for left entirely to the care of Florence, and to the tender watching she bestowed upon him, her father had a better chance, and might by slow degrees be brought to reason, and the swallowing of such draughts as the doctor prescribed; and trouble enough they had to make him, or trust within his lips any dose not made up of adder's blood and powdered snake-skins, "the never-failing prescription," as he said, "of ancient pharmacopœia."

Whether his constitution were a little shaken, or the modern system of medicine went against his stomach, as something long strange and foreign to it, one thing was quite certain, his cold, instead of getting better, grew worse, until it finally resolved itself into rheumatic fever, and poor Dormer lay prostrate on his bed, unable

even to turn in it, or move a finger without the assistance of his daughter, who sat watching by him, humouring his fancies, or indulging his caprices to his heart's content.

The doctor was, even for a doctor, the most obstinate and self-willed man that generation had been guilty of, and he knocked the old man's antiquarianism on the head with so ruthless and uncompromising a hand, as completely to stagger and confound him, sweeping all his cherished notions like so much dirt and rubbish before the fell sweep of his innovating hand, which Dormer had hitherto conceived to be unassailable, impossible to be got at, and as safe from attack from the worst pagan of them all, as that he himself could be struck down by anything less weighty, or less ponderous than an oak. Yet there he was, subdued to all correction, as weak and helpless as if he had been bed-ridden all his life, instead of standing like a doughty champion ready to do battle on his hobby, and confound all those who ventured to assail him.

But the doctor did not seem to care a pin for him, or his hobby either, but at one fell swoop tumbled him over, and laid about him with a fierce hand, maiming and hacking his poor

hobby with as much callous and cold-blooded indifference, as he would take off a limb, or dissect the body of a dead pauper; forgetting in his wrath the pains the other had taken to fashion and create it to his mind, and make his hobby a perfect Bucephalus.

He had the fine black four-post bedstead hung with curtains, and instead of its standing in the middle of the room, as an old bedstead ought to stand, had it shifted to a snug corner, away from the thorough draught that hitherto had made a point of blowing right across it from the window to the cracks in the door. Never was such a metamorphosis; and could Queen Elizabeth have opened her eyes, and seen herself lying side by side with old Dormer, the virgin Queen would not have recognized herself, nor the old bedstead neither! Never was such vandalism, and the man who had been guilty of it ought to have been choked with one of his own boluses—at least Mr. Dormer thought so.

And now, instead of shivering in bed as he used to do, the bright fire sparkled on the unused hearth, and instead of the dark chimney, and the cheerless black four posts staring him in the face, he nestled in a comfortable room, carpeted and curtained after the modern style,

and began thinking there was something after all in recent usages not quite so terrible as he had taught himself to believe, and had hitherto held aloof from.

But the doctor he could never quite get over ; their notions were so hopelessly at variance there was little chance of their meeting half-way, or doing anything by way of compromise. The one was all for warmth, and opposed to thorough draughts ; the other, with the clothes tucked under his chin, and almost blinded by his flannel nightcap, insisting on the merits of fresh air, and hardly any covering at all ! And as there were certain points on which old Mr. Dormer would never consent to own himself beaten, he would lie upon his back, and despite the utter impossibility of moving a single muscle of his body, argue until he or the doctor went to sleep.

His daughter had an anxious time of it, sitting by him in the day, and—snatching such few minutes' slumber as she could—watching through the night, and twenty times in the course of it called from her easy-chair to lift his head or shift his pillow ; and—not that he cared for it—“ but did she think the clothes were as well tucked in as might be, for round that corner post there came a draught fit to turn a windmill ! He loved

fresh air as well as any one ; but what was the good of it, if it only blew through a key-hole ?”

There are times and seasons for all things, and by degrees Mr. Dormer grew as docile as a lamb, swallowed his physic without making a face at it, only wishing he had an ancient pharmacopœia there to tell him how adder's blood and snake skins were compounded, if only for the sake of satisfying his own mind, and confounding the doctor. He took everything they gave him, did everything he was desired, and was at last able to move his legs and to lift his hands, without calling Florence from her chair to lift them for him. The poor girl rested better now that her father rested better, and her pale anxious face began to smile again when the doctor told her father he would soon be well, and able to get about again, but not in slippers down at heel.

No sooner did he feel strong enough to sit upright in bed, with a pile of pillows bolstering him up behind, than he determined, and without more ado, on taking the doctor's system to pieces, and upsetting, as far as books could do it, the whole practice of modern times ; and to that end, had his library ransacked from top to

toe ; then, with a heap of musty folios open upon his bed, held himself prepared to beat the doctor out of the field by unmistakable and irrefragable evidence.

“The modern system,” said Mr. Dormer, “is a system of quackery, and I’ll maintain it in the face of the whole College of Physicians, as they call themselves—a system of quackery, and only invented to gull people, and swindle them out of their money by draughts and powders, pills and boluses. You may make a shift to cure a man now and then, but look at the hundreds you kill ! It is a mere matter of lottery, with no end of blanks to the half-dozen prizes that turn up, and depends entirely upon the free and independent life the patient has led. You can’t kill a man who has bones and muscles in him, that is, such bones and muscles as our forefathers had. If I had led the life of a modern epicure, I should have gone out, like the snuff of a candle, at the first draught—draught of medicine I mean, not thorough draught, as you are thinking of perhaps.”

The doctor promised to be convinced, and if books could do it, to read the whole pile of them the next time he was called in to attend him, which he should soon be, provided he insisted on

going out in slippers after a shower of rain, when he would try a dose of skins and adder's blood; and if that did not cure him, why they could fall back on the new system again, and no great harm done either way.

Mr. Dormer was satisfied. An honourable compromise hurts no man's pride; and now the doctor was willing to be convinced and try his hand at adder's blood, there was no more to be said about it.

The frequent visits of Mr. Stapleton had cheered him in his illness, while his solicitous and constant watching almost kept pace with his good child's; and when she was worn out, exhausted and fatigued by want of sleep, and the doctor insisted on her going to bed for fear she should be ill too, the curate took her place, and waited on her father almost as tenderly as Florence had done—shifted his pillow, raised him higher up, and with his cooling drink ready in his hand, made the night as pleasant, and pass by as quickly, as when Florence herself was there to hasten on the morrow, and let the daylight into his room.

The squire had often come to see him too, but he was anything but a good sick-bed visitor, and complained of the heat of the room, wanted the

window thrown open, and talked of fresh air while the patient shivered in his bed at the bare thought of it. He could never bear a shut-up or confined place; besides, he was busy on his land, and attending to his growing crops, but whether in accordance with the "Five Hundred Points of Good Husbandry," or not, Mr. Dormer could never quite make out. He only wished he were able to get about and help him, but it was no use talking now. Rheumatism had laid him by the heels, and he must wait for summer days to come, before he could venture out cased up in flannel, and protected at all points from the north-east wind.

Those summer days were not far off. The spring had burst upon them now in all its fresh and pleasant green. The leaves were rustling on the boughs that lately had been so bare, and nature's verdant mantle once again was spread upon the sloping valley and the wooded glen. May day with its garlands was passed and gone, when trooping children made chains of flowers and decked themselves with daffodils and cowslips in their sunny prime. The merry month was nearly at its close, and all that month Mr. Dormer had been in bed. The May-pole lay rent and draggled on the ground, the village green had had its dance, while lads and lasses had kissed and toyed about

it, as lads and lasses will always kiss and toy, but those were not the sports old Dormer meant to have; his Christmas gambols had almost faded from his memory, and although he had a solemn vow against the use of strong March beer, his May-day games he hoped would be more sober, more sedate, and freed from squabbles of a drunken bear, ferocious wild man, or skulking knight.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE PICTURES ON THE WALL.

INTENT on study, and busied with a thousand anxious cares, the curate sat in his room, and never heard the slow approach of footsteps coming along the gravel paths leading through his garden, or saw the face that looked within, and watched him sitting there, wrapt in his musings, or intent upon the book he read, only to be roused from it by the knocking that now came upon his door, or when Blakeborough walked into the apartment and stood before him for a few moments regarding him with a calm, yet somewhat downcast look, as though he had come to seek him on some painful errand of his own, and not too well disposed to be satisfied with the task he had undertaken.

There were books upon the table of that cottage chamber, books upon the shelves, and a few articles of luxury and comfort scattered here and there, helping to make the room look smart and trim; and on the wall two pictures hung,

the one near to the other, and in the narrow space between was placed the portrait of a boy, and as the sun came waving through the clustering leaves of climbing plants, shading the window with their green and tender network, the rays of light so fell on them, the eyes of the father and mother appeared to rest upon the boy, each looking at him with a melancholy yet tranquil joy. The child's face was like the mother's and the curate was like them both. He had fair hair as they had, had bright blue eyes as they had—and those eyes now turned with ill-concealed surprise upon his unexpected visitor.

There was a marked difference between the men as they stood face to face for a few moments without speaking. Blakeborough looking first at him, then at the portraits, while he saw the parent's eyes looking at him too, at least he thought so, and turned at last from the mute canvas to the living man: he could face him better and endure the gaze of his fixed eyes better than those painted ones, turning on him whichever way he moved.

Blakeborough's ruddy hue was blanched and pale, while the curate's thoughtful countenance flushed with an unusual crimson, as the two men stood looking still, though neither spoke.

“Mr. Stapleton,” said Blakeborough, constraining himself at last to break the silence, “you will pardon me my intrusion, when I tell you, I am come upon no evil or antagonistic errand. I have sought you to ask you to forget the past, and help me to forget it too. Your office is to teach forgiveness of sins, and I have come to ask forgiveness of mine at your hands.”

The proud man had humbled himself at last, but there was a haughty bearing about him still, and he appeared rather to demand than petition the forgiveness he said he asked for.

“I can forgive all men, I hope. Forgiveness of sins is one of the most beautiful of Christian precepts, and I should be unworthy of my office, if I withheld my own forgiveness from any one who had wronged me.”

“You must do more than forgive, you must forget as well, and listen patiently to what I have to say. You may then think the wrong I have done you the less, and forgiveness more easy than you imagine.”

“I have forgiven, but the wrong remains the same, as far as you are concerned. For myself, I forget it and forgive it too.”

“Your words do, but not your eyes,” said Blakeborough, “and I am like enough to stand

by the wrong again, and scorn forgiveness upon the slightest opposition." His nostrils began to dilate, and his proud arrogant nature to assert itself once again; but seeing Stapleton unchanged, either in look or manner, he calmed his rising passions down, and said once more quietly, "Mr. Stapleton, it is not an easy task for a man like me to bring myself to this, as you may readily suppose; but I am willing to bridge over the gap that lies between us, and do what I can to remove the ill impression you have had of me. You do not know all—you do not know how little I have been to blame."

"I am glad to hear it," was the calm reply. "I am glad to listen to any man who says he is not to blame. But some men are never conscious of the error they commit."

"I am at all events, and have no wish to hide my part in it. I will acknowledge it to the full, and have come to say so."

"It is unnecessary," replied the curate, coldly, "I have forgiven, forgotten; let that be the end."

"No, you must yet hear what I have to say. I have made up my mind to it, and perhaps you will not be displeased to hear it. I have much to say to you, and as a preface to it, will you—will you shake hands?"

“My blood is upon yours, but a Christian should forgive, and so I take it in sign of peace.” The curate took the hand, and as he let it fall again, said, “And now our interview is over.”

“Not so; now I can speak out better than I could at first, for that stain of blood has never been wiped away before, and little as you may think it, I have never looked at this hand of mine without seeing it discoloured, and smelling of the shambles. That blood I shed—I own it to my shame, but the shedding it caused more pain to me perhaps, than to you who lost it. You do not know how deeply I have regretted it, how thankful I have been to Heaven I did not murder you; but I was driven to it, goaded by a false sense of honour, and of pride, and fought because another would not—that branded coward and snaring cheat, who has been my ruin from the beginning to the end.”

“I am only surprised Mr. Blakeborough should associate with a man such as he describes. The world will hardly give you credit for your virtuous resolutions, when you can still walk arm in arm, in open day, and introduce the ‘cheat’ and ‘coward’ that you say he is into the society of honest men,” replied Stapleton, with a slight curl of his lip.

“I should, perhaps, think as you do, if I knew no more than you do. But you do not know this man—how he hunted me, ensnared me from my very youth, and made a market of me. The last time you saw him—and the first time I saw you after our former meeting—I actually shuddered, I confess it to you, when I saw you walk into the room—Upton had come to extort money from me. I could have trampled on him if I had dared, but I could not; for he has the devil’s own scheming in his head, and a certain hold upon my liking still. I know him for a cheat and coward, but, from the force of habit and early friendship—for I loved that man as a brother once—he had still the power to lead me where he liked, and so you met him with me.”

“Have you seen him since?” inquired Mr. Stapleton, with a latent curiosity in his words, wishing to be informed how far Blakeborough had weaned himself from his old associations, or if, indeed, he had done so at all.

“Once, and once only; and am never likely to meet with him again—at least I hope not, for I have come to tremble at his very name; not from any fear of him personally, but for the disgrace and evil the bare knowledge of him brings with it. You will, perhaps, wonder how I ever

became associated with a man such as I describe, and such as you know him to be. It is soon told. I met him first at college, where he was my chum. I was then a raw country youth, full of my passions, and with a longing after pleasure and enjoyment I hardly took the trouble of checking or endeavoured to conceal. Upton, on the contrary—or Captain Upton, as he afterwards styled himself—was a cool-headed young man of the world, who had seen more of its vices, and knew more of its ways, than his gray-headed old uncle cared to hear of, who sent him, as he thought, to a good place to cure him. He could not have chosen a worse for him—or me, as it fell out; for there young men ran riot, and, with money in their pockets, never halted for the means, but found vice and profligacy ready to their hands. He was a master in the art of gaming; and when at night we stole into each other's rooms, and held our midnight orgies, Upton was always ready with cards or dice, willing to profit by our inexperience, and reap a harvest out of us. He was a shrewd, cunning, clever fellow; studied each man's weakness, and how to humour it; but with a certain amount of good humour about him that made us all like him—and he, I believe, for all his selfishness, had a strong affection for me,

from the very fact, perhaps, that I was always ready to share my money and participate with him in anything he proposed. I was his yoke-fellow, and more easily led than any of the rest, the moment they found their pockets suffer, and their parents angry with them. But mine—that is, one of them—my mother!—had always humoured me, and always kept my wild propensities a secret from my father, who ruled me with a rod of iron, and made my boy's life hateful to me. Had I had a different father, he might have had a better son."

They were seated now, and, in spite of himself, the curate listened with increased interest as Blakeborough proceeded.

"My allowance was soon spent. I wrote to my mother for more. It was sent. Upton found a way to spend that, too; and a second time my mother supplied my extravagance and my waste. I had but to tell my own tale, and that mother's love befriended me. May the sun for ever shine upon her grave, and angels whisper as they float above it!"

The recollection of his mother melted him, as it always did; and Stapleton watched him with a kinder feeling when he saw his eyes fill up with tears.

"For the third time her bounteous hand sup-

plied me. She had coaxed my father out of it for some pretended necessity of her own, and sent it to me. Had she been less yielding, I might have been saved—or at least checked in the career of folly and extravagance I now entered on with added zest. I had but to ask, I found the money come, and Upton knew it, too. But the last money went, as the other had gone before. I was in debt again, and again had constant quarrels on my hands, either of my own or Upton's, for I was young and mettlesome, and thought it an honour to fight for a friend who did not seem too well disposed to fight for himself. But our riotings and dissipation breaking through all bounds, the heads of the college at length interfered, and my father was written to about it."

"What did your mother say to that?" The curate's eyes glanced to the picture as he spoke, remembering how *his* mother had humoured him, and how she had petitioned still for him.

"Persuaded him to pay my debts, and leave me free to act the same scene over again. But I was sobered a little at the temper my father showed, and trembled when I read his letter. So I resolved to turn over a new leaf, and apply myself to my studies. But somehow or other, by little and little, I fell away from them again, for

Upton was always at my elbow to tempt me from my task; and, infatuated as I was, I still followed him to my ruin. I was soon in debt again deeper than before; bullied the masters, defied the heads of the college, my father turned his back upon me—and I was expelled.”

“You clung to this man’s counsel still, and forgot your mother!”

“Yet she again befriended me—assisted me in secret, as she best could manage it, and parted with her trinkets to supply my wants. My father found it out, grew furious against me, and would not even see me when my mother tried to get me home again. He was hardened against me worse than ever now, and returned the letters I wrote, begging his forgiveness, unopened and unanswered. A spice of his disposition had always been in me; his blood was in my veins, and I became obstinate and alienated too. I had now no friend but Upton—no one I had so much companionship with; and, rioting in his company in London, soon became almost as great a scoundrel as himself. I was now a practised gamester, thanks to his instruction; and between us we could always command funds to carry on our profligate and debauched career. But men grew shy of us; Upton was suspected

—I don't know how truly, but he *was* suspected—of cheating. The matter found its way into the newspapers; my name got mixed up with his; my father read it, and showed my mother what her son had come to. She wrote to me, telling me what my father had read, and begged me, as I valued Heaven and her love, to turn away from my bad courses."

"And did you, or were you tempted still?"

"I was disgraced," continued Blakeborough, without noticing the interruption. "I had been clearly pointed at, although my surname had been left a blank—indeed I seldom went by it—but everybody knew whom 'Mr. Martin' meant. So I revenged myself as well as I could, cudgelled the writers, drew my sword on any one who looked with doubt upon me, and clung to Upton more than ever, who had blinded me into the belief it was a slander, and that good luck at cards was always called 'cheating' by the losers."

"And you believed him?"

"I did. I could not conceive it possible that any man, though he would do his best to win, could condescend to cheat. But, though people did not dare to turn their backs on me—they knew my sword was always ready if they

did, for I would have fought a thousand duels rather than suffer it—we could not compel them to play in the same set with us, and as we had no means but play to live by, our wants soon became pressing, and each day more harassing. We left the gaming-house we used to frequent, and tried our luck in others—where, unfortunately, we first met you.”

“Young and inexperienced as I was, I had never ventured into one before ; although I had often played, and, like yourself, had met with bad companions in my college life.”

“I seemed to know your face, as I seem to know it now ; I see it in that picture on the wall—but where or when I saw it I could not even guess, any more than I can now.”

“We may have met as boys, perhaps,” said the curate, evading the question of Blakeborough.

“May be. I have no remembrance of it. Upton met you too, and soon prepared to spread his nets about you. He told me you were a young squire lately tumbled into enormous wealth, with thousands in your pocket, which might as well find their way into ours as any one else’s. We played with you and won, but that was nothing new ; you were inexperienced, whilst we were practised hands. You know as well as I, how

madly you ventured with us, and what you lost. I was glad of winning, and you still bent on losing; while Upton still pressed you on, and—which I never knew until too late, for I would have cut my right hand off rather than win to beggar you—urged you to beggar others. He had his meshes well about you, and, tempted by him, you fell as I had fallen.”

“It is a bitter past to both of us. Let us talk no more of it.”

“The end is close at hand, He drew bills upon you for what you had lost, and, as it afterwards came out, forged your name to others; and when you played again together, Upton was accused of cheating. Desperate, and wild with your fresh losses, you struck and challenged him; when, coward as he was, he urged me on to fight you instead of himself. I thought you insolent in your observations to me, and was easily persuaded. You know the rest. You fell, wounded by my hand; Upton disappeared with the ill-gotten spoil he had fleeced you of; and, when the news spread round of what had taken place, I became for the first time convinced of his unexampled villany.” After a momentary pause, he resumed. “My mother dead, my father closed his doors against me; and when *he* died as well,

and I came down to assume my birthright, I was condemned and shunned by honest men, but hedged about with bad associates, false friends, and evil company. However, I have cast them off, and if I live I will redeem the past, and repay you what I won."

"I do not ask it; I do not want it," said the curate, rather proudly.

"I will repay it, and you must take it, unless you wish to see me still more humbled than I am. I won it as I thought fairly; for you will not suppose, I hope, whatever else I may have been guilty of, I could have been rogue enough to cheat you. It was to this end I came; and if you will only bless me with the friendship and forgiveness of an honest man, I pledge my honour never to disgrace or wrong it."

There was a truthful earnestness in Blakeborough's manner impossible to doubt. He would not have told a lie for all the world, and his emotion almost blinded him as he stretched his right hand out in sign of amity and friendship.

The curate took it in his own, grasped it cordially, and the two men faced each other with a better feeling than they ever thought they could have known. If they were not friends, they were at least no longer enemies.

There was a strange connecting link between the two, and the similarity of their careers made them regard each other with kinder thoughts and gentler feelings. They had both neglected the caution and the love of those, whose caution and whose love, deserved a better recompense. Both had suffered ; both had run madly into vice, and, tempted by bad companionship, had sacrificed the peace of others to their selfish ends. The evil time had fallen upon both men ; and a sense of fellowship drew them closer the one to the other, although neither of them could quite shut out the recollection of their former antagonism.

But when the curate was left to himself, and he recalled the interview that had taken place, and the warm grasp he had given to the hand so lately stained with his blood, he stood doubting and surprised ; and, as he raised his eyes once more towards the pictures on the wall, almost fancied he saw his parents' brows contracted with a frown ; regarding him with a displeased expression, at seeing their son familiar with the man who had been the cause of so much misery to them, and of ruin to himself.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE SMOKE IN THE ROOM.

THE day had been close, the atmosphere stifling and heavy. The sun had hardly shone at all, while a hazy veil shut out its summer light. There was no wind to stir the sleeping trees, or rouse the leafy branches to their tuneful rustling. Nature herself seemed hushed, and drooping from the boughs the green and pendent leaves hung down, deprived of motion. The very air was drowsy, men went lazily to their daily work, or pausing in their toil spoke to one another and said "there would be a storm."

But the storm came not that day, nor did the rising vengeance burst the clouds which gathered overhead, or rising against the wind, presaged the lightning and the loud report of fearful thunder. Men dozed on, or wiped from their clammy brows the dull sweat that oozed from out their pores, even when resting from exertion or fatigue. The cattle in the fields lay down in lazy groups, and chewed the cud of peaceful

listlessness. The very birds were voiceless, and never piped their joyous songs to help bright Phœbus on his climbing way; but drooped their wings close to their feathered sides in tuneless groves, until the storm should come, and the heavy rain drench through and through the covert where they hid.

The storm was silent still, the electric spark had not yet shot its bolt, waking the rattling thunder up, or sending it pealing and reverberating through space. But as the shades of evening closed about the sunless day, the sheeted lightning flashed and glimmered in the far horizon, with bright and sudden flames, then sinking into darkness once again the sky resumed its leaden hue, and all was misty, dark, and undefined.

The gusty wind at last swept by, and heavy drops of rain came pattering down, spotting the thirsty ground with large and soaking blots. The rain fell for a few minutes, then left off again. The air felt cooler and less charged with electricity than it had been, while an earthy smell rose from the wetted ground, cool and refreshing after the sultry day.

Lucas heard the heavy plashing drops, and looking from his window watched the distant flashes of the summer lightning. He put his hand

outside to feel if it were raining still, but the shower had passed ; so drawing his candle closer to his paper he sat down and wrote again.

It was no easy task with his pens spluttering in the way they did, and though he slashed and hacked at them with his penknife he could never get a nib to his mind, or one that spelt the words with any approach to what he thought they ought to be. He had a dictionary open by his side, and with his finger glued upon the word thought he had it right at last ; but then another and another came, and his sheet would not be full and fairly copied for hours to come. If he could not spell himself the dictionary could, and Lucas had shut himself up in his room to have a hard night of it.

But spelling was one thing and writing another, and do what he would he could not make his ups and downs at all resemble the fine round hand he had been taught to write upon his Christmas pieces at the charity school, while his spluttering pen kept shedding frightful drops on his most finished strokes of penmanship. There was not a human soul he could trust to write what he wanted for him, so sitting by the light of his candle Lucas made up his mind to spell and write the night through if need be.

With his arms spread out and his head bent sideways over his paper the studious Lucas wrote, then scratched it out again, and so went blotting on, digging the words out of the dictionary one by one, and with great pains and industry transferring them to the paper; but the novelty of their appearance confounded him, and he could not make them out for what they ought to be a bit. He had never spelt in that way before, and if the dictionary was right, he was sorry for it, that was all.

In those bright days of early reminiscence, in the first confident flush of under-footman's life, when he felt he could aspire and should be blessed if the lady's-maid would only condescend to listen to him, he had taken quite as much pains, or even more, to write to Miss Topman and ask her to be his. He had told her all his many expectations, and many more than he ever hoped for; and if she would only let him know how much she had saved and what her perquisites were, Lucas was hers "till death did them part." But whether her savings were not sufficient to justify her style of dressing, or her perquisites not what they should be, Miss Topman never replied to him, never even noticed him when they met, but made conundrums and "scratched-cradled"

with the butler in the servants' hall, as though there were no Lucas in the place at all. Yet there he was, placidly indignant, standing on one leg beside the fire, with his elbow leaning upon the chimney-piece with the most easy yet accomplished grace, enough to have captivated a generation of lady's-maids with any eyes in their heads.

What spiteful things he had said of her, and what faces he had made at her behind her back ! And could it be Miss Topman after all was not to blame, but that his spelling had taken a flight beyond her comprehension ? The dictionary might perhaps be right after all, and the old Jew be able to make the impossible spelling out, although he could not.

He had promised to write to him, and let him know anything he could find out. He had a deal to tell him, but no news of Mr. Upton yet, though he hoped to have, and to see *him* hung at all events. He had listened night and day and might have found out something worth the old Jew's money ; but his master hardly gave him a chance now, and had left off speaking to himself as he used to do—at least Lucas could never catch him at it ; but the time might come, and if it did, he told Mr. Isaacs he should be sure and hear from him.

He took out the dirty dog-eared card old Isaacs had given him when they went upstairs to the squire's room, with his name and address written on it, and thus refreshed began to write again.

“Would Mr. Isaacs be so good as to pint out to him how he could sell a little plate, and a ring or two, as 'ad been left him by his Ant?”

He would not give up spelling “Ant” after his own fashion for all the dictionaries in the land. His “Ant” always signed herself in that way, and it was odd if an “Ant” did not know how to spell her own name. “He had some rings and spoons—” The flash that came into the room was enough to have melted them in his box, while crashing overhead, as though the roof were beaten in, roared out a clap of thunder, an awful and terrific crash, that started Lucas from his paper as he ran to close his window; while flash followed flash, and peal came on peal, splitting the very air with its unexpected jar and rattle.

The storm had come at last in all its fury. Again the lightning blinded him, and again the awful thunder stunned him with its appalling crash. The flash and the report were simultaneous, and Lucas stood motionless with terror, when he saw a blue and trembling flame playing

‘ along the bell wire running round the ceiling of his room. There never was such a peal without mischief on the heels of it. The roof must be off, a dozen trees splintered, or a barn set fire to at the very least. But Lucas was safe, and the rest he did not care for.

Yet there the blue electric light still played along the bell wire, frightening him out of his wits, when, throwing his window open, the trembling light shot out of it, or went running off upon its sightless way.

The rain came steeping down at last, as though the floodgates of a mighty torrent were opened in the skies ! Down it came, drenching and smoking, to the earth, while the thunder rolled, and the forked lightning split the circling arch of heaven, dazzling his eyes with the intensity of its momentary fire, until at last clattering and rumbling far away the distant thunder rolled, while bright and vivid flashes only came at intervals, lighting the distance with its gleaming fire.

The storm had passed, and Lucas made up his mind to write again, although he still trembled and looked pale. He closed his window, squared his elbows well upon the table, and was about recommencing where he had left off, at “spoons,”

when a small beating against the walls of the chamber, and a sudden rustling, made him look round in wonder at the cause.

A bat had flown into his room, and it was of no use trying to write, with that nasty, black demon-looking thing flapping and rushing here and there. He threw his window open once again, and tried to frighten it out the same way it had come, but to no use ; the bat only flapped the more, or flew about the ceiling, fluttering along the bell wire as the lightning had done, and Lucas began to think he should never get his letter finished after all. He had lost a good half-hour or more, standing on the stool, trying to knock it down with his knotted handkerchief, while the bat whisking wildly across or round about, kept flitting everywhere but where he would have it.

Lucas got off his stool at last, and sat looking at it, wistfully and killingly.

How should he catch it? That was a puzzle, but if he only had it in his hand, he would make short work of it, and wring its nasty mouse-looking head off. The bat never gave him a chance, but shooting across the ceiling, or round about the edges of the room, left him looking and sitting still.

He rose up in despair, and taking his pen, began to spell his way again, and write his letter to the Jew.

He had scratched some half-dozen words, and made as many blots, when the bat dashed its leathern wings into his face, and nearly knocked him and the light down at the same time, then whisked away and went skimming about the room again.

This was not to be borne. Snatching the sheet off his bed, Lucas spread it upon the floor, as a fine trap to catch him in, but the bat only looked the more ugly, as it shot across it in its restless flight, and Lucas was no wiser than he had been. With the counterpane doubled in his hand, he might have a chance, and the very next time the bat flew by he smothered him in its folds, and fixed him safe at last. Rolling the clothes up in a heap, he jumped and stamped upon them, then shook his sheet and coverlid out of the window, fastened it up again with a triumphant smile, and sat down again to write to Isaacs.

The squire had not returned from Petworth, whither he had gone to give evidence against the poachers, and would not require his assistance on his return. That he knew well enough, for the

squire had told him so. He nibbed his pen, and was in the act of dipping it in the ink, when he thought he smelt something like burning wood, while a thin smoke oozed into his room through unseen crevices. There was no fire in the grate nor in the fire-places on that side of the house. The kitchens were far away, and Lucas went sniffing about the room or looking up the chimney, wondering where it could come from.

Two nights before there had been the same smoky smell. He had searched and searched for it, and even went into the kitchen to tell the cook of it, and inquire after the health of the kitchen chimney. But her temper was none of the mildest, and Lucas was driven into his room again to sniff and wonder half the night through.

He had looked into all the rooms over which his own was placed, but they were not used now, and had been without fires in them for two years or more. The old mansion was only half inhabited, and the unoccupied rooms shut up in cheerless solitude, which in the old squire's time, and with a woman's eye to look after their management, had been kept in better order, and the whole house made bright and comfortable by glowing fires and well-arranged furniture; but since the young squire had come into possession, they had

remained neglected and shut up. He had neither means to make them serviceable nor uses for them, and hardly ever set his foot in them or opened their doors. But Lucas had. There had been no fires on the old hearths since he had been there he knew, and the underground cellars were only tenanted by rats and such like vermin. He had no inclination to visit them, closed up as they had been for more than a century, like charnel houses at the bottom of that old gloomy place. There were no fires anywhere on the side where he slept, and yet his room was filled with smoke, but how it got there Lucas could not even guess.

It did not come down the chimney, and yet about the sides of it a thin blue smoky vapour kept curling up, floating into the room, but where the smoke itself came from was a mystery. If Lucas had not smelt it two nights before, he would have said the lightning had set some of the old timbers on fire, with the direct view of burning him in his bed, but the night before the smoke was just as bad, came about the same time, and there had been no lightning then. It could not be the poachers, or the burnt fumes from some fired rick; they had been disposed of long ago, there were no fears of outhouses being burnt down or

midnight fires now. It was of no use guessing, so Lucas gave it up as a bad job, and sat down to finish his letter.

In busy application between the dictionary and his paper, he still wrote on, and filled two sides of his sheet with some of his best attempts at penmanship; but whether with the same illegible pothooks and hangers he had addressed to Miss Topham, history must decide, when the world shall be enlightened with all that Lucas ever wrote in his hours of confidential trust. His correspondence was necessarily limited, but not the less valuable for that; and unborn publishers yet may stumble on the treasures of his pen, and give them to the world in edifying and instructive pages, under the auspices of a sufficiently competent and enlightened editor.

He had been writing for some considerable time, and was in the act of making a fair copy of his blurred and blotted manuscript, when a horse came clattering into the yard, and he heard his master shortly after come up the staircase. Lucas put down his pen, and holding the door ajar, listened if any one were with him. No; his master's heavy foot came slowly pacing up, and if he wanted anything he could ring. His lamp was ready on the table, and lying beside it were

a newspaper and a letter that had come by the post from London ; and Lucas hoped to have a peep at the "Daily Advertiser" in the morning over his favourite repast, and read the fashionable news to Sally as he sipped his coffee and ate his buttered toast, with all that easy nonchalance peculiar to his calling.

The squire had been over to the Hall ; Lucas had a shrewd guess what his visits there meant, and had often busied himself with the question as to how he should like a missus, and how Sally would like one too ? He had a horror of a woman's eye about a house, and the natural curiosity belonging to the sex. She *might* want to look in his box ; she *might* miss the spoons, and, what was worse, insist on their being found. His master was more easily talked over, and did not make much fuss about it, though *he* was getting more particular than he used to be, and talked oddly at times—so oddly, Lucas wanted to get rid of the contents of his box, and was therefore writing to the Jew in hopes of doing a little business with him, more especially if he would make it "vorth his while" as he had promised.

He closed the door again, and let his master have the full enjoyment of his newspaper and letter. He had tried his utmost to get a peep

at it beforehand, but there was no chance for it, it was too securely folded, and defied his utmost skill even to get a glimpse at the contents; but the squire had careless habits, and his attentive servant might yet find it in his drawers or pockets, and have a quiet spell all to himself. In the meantime he condescended to let the squire have the first peep. Lucas could wait, and read it secondhand.

He finished his letter to the Jew at last, and wrote the direction without a single blur. It ran—"Mr. Isaacs, Waterman's Court, Whitefriars, London, England." And Lucas thought, if he would only pay the money down, and ask no questions, he'd let him have a good penny-worth.

He was on the point of opening his box to make sure he had counted the contents without missing a single item, when he thought he would listen at the door to make certain no one was watching on the outside, who *might* hear the chink of plate, and cease to wonder where the spoons had got to.

The passage was dark as pitch, so he closed the door behind him, and creeping to the banister, put his head over the rail and listened. All was quiet: there was no sound except the

pacing of his master's heavy foot, walking up and down the room on the other side the staircase. He did nothing else but walk like a caged lion up and down his den ; something was amiss, and Lucas crept back into his room to think how he should find it out.

He did not dare to venture down, for the light came through the opened door of his mother's room. He had taken a fancy lately always to have his door open now, and even if it were shut, the keyhole was stuffed with paper, so that what with one thing and the other there was no chance of available information ; and even if the door and keyhole could be come at, there was little to be got out of it, for the squire kept no company now, and saw no one except the people over at the Hall. There was no Mr. Baxter now to double his fist at him, and give him the nightmare with only thinking of it. His old companions were cast off, and in place of them the squire had taken to his books, and would often read after all the household, and even Lucas, were asleep, which with him, as a rule, was a long time coming about, and of uncertain duration.

The light still glimmered through the open door, while the impatient and uneasy steps of

Blakeborough kept walking up and down. The letter had perhaps disturbed him, and Lucas must bide his time to find it out. He hid his own epistle carefully away between the ticking of his bed, spread his sheet and coverlid over it, locked his door, blew out his light, crept on his mattress, and went to sleep.

How long he slept he could not even guess, but when he awoke he was in a cold sweat. He had dreamt the house was on fire, and the heavy beams did nothing but keep bumping overhead, and yet he was unable to stir hand or foot, but lay panting in his bed, expecting the ceiling to tumble down and bury him amid its falling rafters and smouldering fire, while the smoke almost stifled him; yet he could not wake, although the noise and heavy falling still went on, and he was sensible of all, but could not open his eyes or shake the nightmare off.

At last he awoke, and sitting upright in his bed, could hardly believe in the darkness of his room, waking from his dream of red-hot fire! But he smelt the smoke for all that; while overhead, pacing to and fro, his master's ceaseless tread, went on and on, in measured footfalls. It was late when he went to bed; he had slept some time, and the early glimpse of morning,

struggling from the east, was paling the fading darkness of the night.

If his master were not tired of walking, Lucas was of listening; yet there he still kept on his measured pace, up and down, like the caged lion he had before compared him to. Perhaps he smelt the smoke as well, and did not like to go to bed any more than Lucas had done the night before, his heavy footfall startling him in his dreams making him fancy the roof was falling in.

What could have happened? Something unusual, for his master had not walked in the way he was now doing, since the night preceding Mr. Garroway's execution. Had he had a letter telling him another friend was in a fair way of a hempen neckcloth, and was Mr. Upton going to try how it fitted him?

The Jew would give something to know of that, and the spoons would fetch a better price if he could only tell him of it. Perhaps he had left the letter on the table or torn it up, but the pieces could be put together even if they were torn; that Lucas knew well enough from old experience.

Creeping out of his bed he struck a light in his tinder-box as softly as he could, and with the

lighted candle in his hand unlocked his door and listened on the landing. His master was walking still, and like the Ghost in "Don Giovanni," gave terrible evidence of an unquiet spirit.

Lucas could hardly be said to walk, he glided down stairs so noiselessly, his bare feet not even making a sound he could himself have heard. Shading his candle with his hand so as to throw its light above him, and below him, he looked carefully about. There was not even a mouse upon the stairs, and moving stealthily along, Lucas reached the room his master had lately quitted.

He looked upon the table, there was no letter, nor were there any torn-up pieces on the floor, nothing but one half of the newspaper, crumpled and separated from the other half. He smoothed it out and then pored over it, with his candle held close up to it.

There was nothing in it, nothing but news from France, advertisements, strange births, and a long account of a monstrous gooseberry weighing six ounces. The paper had been torn in two, but the other half was not there any more than the letter. Could there have been anything in the newspaper to keep his master out of his bed, and frighten Lucas out of his? If pockets

held it, or drawers were not locked by a new process, Lucas thought he would have a peep at it in the morning.

The buffet was open, and the brandy flask had evidently been called into active service. It was a hint to Lucas, and lifting it to his mouth he sucked at it, for some time. But as he tilted the bottle to get an easier drink at it, the brandy went the wrong way, and almost strangled him. With his mouth full and his eyes starting from his head, he spluttered and twisted himself about until he was as red in the face as a turkey cock. He did not dare to cough, but thrusting his hand into his mouth choked in terror and alarm for fear his master should hear him, and throttle him right off.

He put the brandy flask back again into the buffet, crumpled up the newspaper and placed it just as he had found it, then went softly up the stairs again into his room, thankful and delighted to have got back so well; and, full of expectation as to what the morning might bring to him, slid into his bed again, and holding his head well under the clothes coughed and spluttered at his ease.

Everything was silent now, his master had left off walking and had gone to bed as well.

But the smoke still came. He could see it drifting about when he opened his door, and returned into the room. Wondering where it could come from Lucas lay in bed and sniffed himself at last to sleep.

CHAPTER XX.

THE SUPERSTITION.

THE overnight's storm had cleared the atmosphere—the dull haze no longer hung about the earth; the fresh breezy air came, its fragrant breath perfumed with new-mown hay, or scented with the wild and purple thyme—the gaudy yellow cups glistened in the early sun, and the lark poured out its joyous matins to the God of newly-awakened day—the woods and groves were tuneful once again—the feathered tenants spread their dewy wings, straining their little throats with harmonizing trills—the green and half-swelled corn rustled its wavy ears, while pendent leaves shook down the glittering drops, falling like crystals, glancing in the sun, and nature's beaming face smiled a glad welcome to the earth again.

But though the morning was so bright, the lightning had left its mark behind. Its scathing bolt had shot its blue and momentary fire from the angry clouds, that so late had jostled over-

head, and ushered in the tempest. All these were passed away and the remembrance only of the stormy frown was left in one dark spot where its glancing bolt had fallen; but there a branching, venerable oak which had braved the wrath of time for countless years lay torn and splintered, its huge trunk shivered into million fragments, its knotted core split and rifted into thin tapering points, sharp and glittering as needles—its entire bulk blanched and twisted into fantastic shapes, rising in myriads of minute fibres as fine and bright as splintered glass. But though the bolt had made such havoc with the stem, its ponderous top lay on the ground untorn and vast. The gleaming fire had fallen like a flashing sword, and smiting off the giant's head, laid it prostrate, leaving the useless trunk as weak and puny now, as the sapling once had been.

There was no flaw, no woody rot to undermine its strength, yet there the monarch of the forest lay, the type of human greatness and its soaring pride. Its storm-defying bulk and wide-spread glories were all withered now, while the poor weedy parasites that once had crouched beneath its shade could spread, and grow, and choke its stem and useless branches up.

A knot of labourers and farming-men stood

looking at it with a sense of awe, wondering at the power of the lightning that could splinter a mighty tree like that. It was the oldest oak for miles about, and a sight men came to look at. The old squire's lady used to sit and sew there, while Master Martin frolicked round the stem and tried to span it with his boyish arms, and she sat watching, laughing at his childish tricks and told him how many yards it was about, and how many men it took, holding each others' hands, to clasp it round. But she who had once sat within its shade was gone, and now the tree was gone as well.

They had a superstition about that tree, and thought the old house and the old oak had a sympathy between them, and that the acorn it grew from was planted at the same time the first stone of old Chase House was laid. The tree was down, how long would the house stand up?

Blakeborough had the same superstition too, and turned white and death-like when he was told it had been struck by lightning. One of the turrets of the house had been struck too, and its split and shivered stones lay scattered in the court-yard, as though both tree and house had been smitten by the same bolt; and Lucas blesse his lucky stars he had not been struck as well,

though the very lightning had come into his room and played about the bell-wire, and the frightened bat had flown in at the same time.

Blakeborough had risen earlier than usual. He still held the half of the newspaper in his hand, and Lucas longed to have a peep at it. He watched the pocket into which the squire thrust it, and thought if he could only get the coat to brush, he'd brush and read at the same time.

But his master had heard of the stricken oak, and had hurried out to see it.

Fallen in the midst of the garden, it lay crushing down shrub and flower, burying in its mighty swoop railing, and fence, and rustic seats, over which it had reared its lofty head; for, though other trees had been grubbed up to make room for fruit and flowers, the ancient oak was left, and in the centre of that garden grew, as it had grown for centuries.

It was here they held their summer feasts, and sought a shelter from the noon-day sun. There was an old romance about it, and servant-maids had often traced the fairy rings upon the turf beneath it, and the good genius of the house was said to live and die with it. They had all been taught a sylvan worship for that tree,

and no Blakeborough would have cut a branch of it to save his fortune ! Yet there it lay at last, struck down upon the sward its boughs had shaded over, and where his tiny feet had played, gathering acorns for his childish games.

He had planted one of them, but there was a superstition still in that, and the fable ran that no acorn plucked from its boughs could live to be a tree. The one he had set grew up, and, with its leaves well spread, the sapling seemed to defy the olden say ; but the stem soon rotted, its leaves faded, and, when cut down, a nest of snakes was found buried in a hollow at its roots ; and no one ever ventured to plant an acorn from that tree again.

A strange presentiment came over him as he stood looking at the shivered trunk, and saw its mighty top dashed to the ground. Was he to fall as prone, and were his house and name to wither and fade away as quickly as its leaves ? The tree had fallen ; that was no reason why he should fall as well. He tried to think not, but the early superstition was too deeply engrafted in him to be shaken off so easily, as with folded arms he stood looking at it, humbling himself before the child's belief in fairy warning and in elfin spells.

His mother had believed in it before him—had often told him tales of silvery voices heard in summer nights whispering through the leaves; and how a woodman once had lifted his axe to strike it; how the axe fell from his hands, and he was hunted by a troop of elfin sprites, with Robin Goodfellow at their head, who pinched him black and blue, and sent him roaring home, crying for mercy to the mystic oak whose bark he had tried to wound. He was wiser now, he thought, than he had been when a child; and yet, for all his manly knowledge and his world-wide wisdom, he could not quite shut out that mother's teaching, or the recollection of nursemaid tales of sprites and pigmies.

And yet, perhaps, he had enough of mental misery to make him think that fabled lore was right; that elves and fairies, dancing in their circling round, presaged in their small wisdoms the events and circumstances of mortal life, as each day came fraught with a new trouble closing about him, like a round iron cell, its circle narrowing every hour, until at last it shut him up by slow degrees, pressing and crushing him in its close embrace.

He quitted the garden with a dejected air, and passing towards the house, saw in the dis-

tance a man's figure walking along the private road, down which he had watched the Jew come shadowing between the trees. It was unusual for a stranger to turn down that road, only used by the people of the house. The man advanced yet nearer, walking at a steady pace, when Blakeborough thought he recognized the stranger, who moved along with free and independent step, as though he had a right to choose his path, and not regard the written notice at the lodge, of "Private Road." He stood still for a few moments, took his hat off to wipe his forehead, when his bald crown and powdered hair satisfied Martin who it was. It was the lawyer, Pritchard, who had paused to wipe his brow and polish up the glasses of his spectacles. He saw Blakeborough too, and waving his hand by way of recognition, came walking on at a smarter pace than before.

"Good morning, squire!" shouted Mr. Pritchard, when within shouting distance. "But confound these roads of yours; they are enough to shake the life out of a steady-going man like myself, used only to London flag-stones and the ups and downs of Fleet Street and the Strand. If I had not been a good walker all my life, and fond of the exercise, I should have knocked up

when half-way on that break-neck lane of yours between this and Haslemere."

"Good morning, my dear sir! There are few men I am so pleased and happy to shake hands with as yourself," said Blakeborough, meeting the lawyer half-way, and shaking his outstretched hand warmly and cordially.

"Thank you, squire, thank you. But I wish you would mend your roads, though, or how do you expect your London friends to come to see you with the chance of breaking their necks? Or perhaps you have a motive for it, and wish to give them that chance in a quiet way—some of them, at least."

"Not yours, at all events, my good sir; and if I had known you had been coming, I would have sent to fetch you, and saved you the jogging road you have had to walk over."

"Fetch me!" cried Pritchard, with a good-humoured laugh. "No, thank you; I had rather trust my own legs than the best pair of springs ever bent under a chaise, up such a rutty, smashing way as that, and running the chance of sticking fast in the middle after all. Wood and iron are not equal to what bone and muscles can do, and so I'd rather walk up that particularly agreeable country road of yours. We lawyers are wiser. See how nice and smooth we

keep *our* ways *into* the law—but, once *in* it, Heaven help you well out of it, say I."

"You have helped me well out of it," said Blakeborough, with a cheerful smile. "But for you I should have stuck in the middle, like the cart in a rut you just now spoke of, with Clam and old Isaacs mounted on the top of each shoulder, striving might and main to keep me there."

Pritchard appeared tickled by the novelty of the suggestion, and chuckled and laughed until the tears ran down his face, then wiped his spectacles again, and blowing out his cheeks, cried, "I found it hard work enough, without carrying a pair like that. The rain had made the clay more sticky than ever, it clung to me like bird-lime, and nearly dragged my shoes off my feet, climbing up that *splendid* thoroughfare of yours. Why don't you make a bowling-green of it, squire, and let it out at so much a mile?"

"It wants mending badly enough," replied Blakeborough; "and when I have mended my *own* ways, I'll have a turn at that."

"All in good time, squire, all in good time. The worst ways may yet be mended. No offence, I hope, but a good beginning, you know, is everything, and I think you have made one."

"Thanks to your assistance, my good sir.

But you are tired with your walk, let me offer you some refreshment."

"Refreshment!" cried the lawyer, as though such a word had never been heard of before. "Refreshment! I have eaten enough at the 'White Horse' to last me a week! Unmistakable ham, and eggs fresh from the nest! Mrs. Bushell is a rare hostess! It is worth a day's journey only to look at her beds and smell the ham broiling for breakfast. I should have been here last night but for that buxom dame, who kept me, whether I would or no, from breaking my neck up that splendid 'Lover's Lane' of yours, and getting drenched to the skin. Not that I much care for a drenching when I have business to do, and what I have come upon is business, I can tell you; but somehow or other that woman got the better of me, and I found myself tucked up in bed with the white dimity floating about me, before I well knew where I was. Mrs. Bushell will have her way, and if Mr. Bushell is not a happy man, why he ought to be, that's all I can say."

"What brought you down so late last night?" asked Blakeborough.

"Oh! the old stage coach," replied Pritchard, applying the word "brought" to his own sense,

“that will insist on crawling along in spite of all Mr. Palmer’s new plan for the mails, that *won’t* go eight miles an hour though he wants them. I am for easy travelling, squire, and ‘mine ease in mine inn,’ and such break-neck speed as he wants to force us to won’t do, as I take it. We lawyers are slow coaches at the best of times, and our posting house in Chancery Lane is not over famous for fast going horses, you know.”

Pritchard gave a short chuckling laugh at this, while Blakeborough, anxious to know what had called him from town, tried to bring him from his rambling talk to the more immediate occasion of his visit, and said—

“But when you got to Haslemere——?”

“I was just in time for the lightning, and when that gave over, I was just in time for the rain. So Mrs. Bushell——”

“Oh! I see,” cried Blakeborough, smiling, “you had a learned consultation with the landlady and she advised a trial of goose down and dimity.”

“None of your waggery, squire, if you please. Mrs. Bushell is a landlady of ten thousand, and as buxom a dame as ever fell to the lot of a well-to-do bachelor; but, as you say, she did move for a fresh trial, and after a slight demur on my part

got it, and so, instead of wading through the mud up that magnificent pathway of yours—hem! I reposed in home-spun linen, breakfasted like an alderman; and here I am, fit for business, only in too good spirits for what I have to do. But business is business, and must be done, whether pleasant or unpleasant.”

“You have business of some moment then, and of no very agreeable nature? I am sorry for it, and hope our good friends up at the Hall——”

“Bad work, squire, bad work,” interrupted Pritchard; “and what is worse, it can’t be helped. I wish it could, with all my heart, for old Dormer is a worthy man, a very worthy man, only spoiled by his insane notions of antique virtue, and the impossible blessing of old customs. All rubbish, squire, and not worth wasting a thought about—a set of barbarous ruffians who had no respect for law—or equity either—if it comes to that.”

“But Mr. Dormer——”

“Ay! ay! he is mad as a March hare after it, and talks of nothing but the ‘glorious old times,’ as he calls them. But this business will take it out of him, I fancy, and give him something more serious to think of.”

“Is it a secret?” asked Blakeborough; “for without wishing to pry into what I have no right

to ask, I have an earnest desire for his welfare, and hope nothing will interfere with it."

"Of course you have," said Pritchard, "very earnest, I have no doubt. You and the young lady have smoothed down your little difficulties I suppose, and like good neighbours and loving companions read 'Clarissa Harlowe' until your eyes are red and your hearts grow tender as asparagus; or play at backgammon and cribbage, while the old gentleman sits and nods over his paper, a week old from town. By the way, squire, there is something in yesterday's 'Advertiser' has made a rare stir in London, I can tell you."

"Indeed!" said Blakeborough, with a nervous faltering in his voice, he tried in vain to control.

"Oh yes; those fellows who robbed the mail over here on Hind Head, some months ago, have a fair chance of being found out; that is, if there is any justice for rogues, and good luck for the gallows. One of the scoundrels was hung for it, the other three managed to get safe off, as you know; but the last week or two they have crept out of their holes, it seems, and tried their hands at changing notes stolen from bankers' remittances and from letters in the mailbags. They have a good scent of the rogues at last. The notes were all changed about the neighbourhood of St. Martin's

Lane, and a man was taken up on suspicion yesterday for passing one in the city. He came honestly enough by it, it appears, and took it in the way of his trade. The Bow Street constables are on the look-out after the fellows though, and good luck go with them, say I."

"St. Martin's Lane!" Blakeborough merely echoed the words, but made no further observation, though he looked pale and anxious as he walked along in silence for some time in the direction of the Hall—his hand thrust into his pocket, where the torn paper lay, as if to keep it safely there—in company with Pritchard, who kept close by his side, looking every now and then into his face, and speaking rapidly.

"The newspaper was full of it yesterday," resumed the lawyer, "and to-morrow they'll have another piece of business to print worse even than that—worse, at all events, as regards our friend over yonder; and yet, here have I been eating new-laid eggs and ham, with as much relish as a lord chancellor reposing at his ease upon his woolsack, and well paid to do it too, instead of splashing through the rain, as I ought to have done last night, to be the first in at the death, and make my old friend as comfortable as I could in the midst of such a shower of

bad news as I have to pour upon him. The storm of last night was nothing to it, and if it had not been for Mrs. Bushell——” Here he went off again ; then resuming the thread of his discourse, which the thought of the new-laid eggs, and Mrs. Bushell, had broken in upon, said, “ But I hope the scoundrel will swing for it—a cold-blooded, swindling thief, who’d think no more of ruining a man than I should of cracking a nut.”

“ Mr. Dormer ruined ! By what means ? ” inquired Blakeborough, startled by the suddenness of the ill news.

“ Oh ! those sort of fellows never halt for the means, they find them out as naturally as a rat does a hole. But this one must have been assisted by somebody who knew the old man and his habits—a stranger could not have found it out if he had tried until doomsday. There has been some double dealing at work, I’d give a thousand pounds to find out, and I will find out too, before I have done with it.”

“ I cannot of course guess,” said Blakeborough, “ the ill-tidings you allude to ; I can only hope it is not so terrible as your words seem to imply.”

“ It’s worse, squire, ten thousand times worse !

The ship from the West Indies brought us bad news enough the night before—his sugar plantations, which is the nest-egg of all his wealth, have been destroyed by the refractory negroes. French gold has been at work with them, and French agency—we know what dabs they are at them—has been busy in our settlements. They have a longing for some of our rich islands, as they had for India and America, until our British bulldogs showed their teeth and hunted them out. Now they are trying another game, and the last news that came was ruinous, as far as Mr. Dormer is concerned; and now this business comes on the heels of it to break the old man's heart, and send him to his sick bed again with something worse than rheumatism."

"I am all anxiety, Mr. Pritchard, and if your business is not private, pray inform me of it. I am most solicitous to know everything that is associated with the name of so good and true a friend as Mr. Dormer has been to me."

"Oh! he's not a bad sort when you let him have his way, and don't run counter to his old customs and stuff of that sort. It is a good thing for you, squire, the news comes so late, or your Jew and lawyer might not have been got rid of so easily, for want of funds to

pay them off. I only hope we shan't have to foreclose with *our* mortgage, as they threatened to do with theirs, for a pair of rogues as they were."

He had started from his subject again, and was walking on, side by side with Blakeborough, without slackening in his speed or tiring in his walk. He would have his own way Blakeborough knew, and his anxiety grew painful in his desire to know the worst that had befallen the good people at the Hall. Florence would suffer too, he thought, and though she could not love *him* Blakeborough loved *her*, and would have sacrificed his own peace to have added to her comfort, and make her free of care and trouble. At last he said—

"But this other news, Mr. Pritchard, you have not told me what that is."

"You'll see it in the papers, if you ever read London print in these outlandish parts—the whole particulars from top to toe of this rascally piece of business. For my part, I wish all the foreign swindlers were burnt at Smithfield, as they used to burn witches in King James's time, for not half as bad."

"Not half so bad as what?" asked Blakeborough, rather impatiently.

“Five thousand pounds gone at a lump—coaxed out of his agent’s hands by a forged order, which like an ass he paid. If he had only come to me I should have found the cheat out, and caught my foreigner by the ear—a fellow dressed up in a Frenchified cap, with a beard half over his face—a tall, swaggering fellow, with eyes as sharp as ferrets.”

Blakeborough grasped a road-side paling as he heard the description, and turned sick at heart. He had seen Upton dressed in the same fashion, and the knowledge of what the man could do chilled the blood within his veins. Pritchard looked at him with surprise; then pausing by his side, patted him on the shoulder, as he said—

“Come, come, squire, this won’t do; if you take on this way, how the deuce do you expect I shall be able to tell the tale to Mr. Dormer?”

“A tall, foreign-looking man?” asked Blakeborough, falteringly.

“If he wasn’t a Frenchman, he was rogue enough to be one,” replied Pritchard, with all the Englishman’s hatred full upon him of anything French. “We have suffered enough by those frog-eaters I think lately, and now this

fellow comes with a forged order, written and spelt, for all the world like two peas, with one of old Dormer's veritable epistles, and gets five thousand pounds upon the strength of it, draws it from his agent's strong box in notes and gold, and whiffs away with it before the cheat is found out; and when I met this sleepy-eyed goose of a fellow only an hour after in the street, you might have knocked him down with a feather when I told him Mr. Dormer had been sick in bed at the time the order was dated, and unable to write his name, much less a long rigmarole like that."

Blakeborough, with his hand pressed upon his side, stood holding by the rail, while the lawyer had gone on with his story, and left him stupified and conscience-stricken. He now knew the reason *why* Upton had asked him for old Dormer's letter, when they sat in the dark room at the "Angel Inn," and the uses he had put it to; he had copied the old man's antiquated style of writing, with the skill he was famous for, forged his name as well, and by dint of cunning and inquiries, had discovered his London agent, to whom he had presented the counterfeited document, and robbed the good old man of so large a sum. His indignant fury swelled within

him, when he thought of the base part Upton had played, as starting into sudden and ungovernable passion, he exclaimed—

“Double cheating villain that he is, if I only had him in my grip, I’d set my foot upon him, and make him own his villany. It is not the first he has been guilty of, but if I had him here it should be the last.”

“Do you know him then?” asked the lawyer suddenly and sharply.

“I am sure of it,” said Blakeborough, rather startled by the abruptness of the inquiry, and the conviction of having betrayed his knowledge of the man by the almost unconscious words he had uttered in his passion. “I saw him in London, in Holborn, after I left you. He had a cap and beard such as you describe, and eyes—there was no mistaking them—I feel them on me even now. But I’ll hunt him up, I will, if I take the law into my own hands, and cheat the hangman of such a double-dealing thief.”

“I wish you had him now then, with all my heart. But the scouts are after him, and Bow Street runners scouring from one end of London to the other. I had a reward of five hundred pounds offered for my friend, and bills stuck upon the walls in every hole and corner. If I

only catch him, I'll give him leave to cheat again if I let him go. But we are at the Hall now, and there is old Dormer with his girl, sitting in the porch, sunning himself in this bright June day."

Within the warm and sunny doorway the old gentleman was seated, basking in the morning's sun; Florence, busy with her needle and thread, sat on a low stool at his feet, while the new curate stood leaning against the jessamine-covered trellis work that shut it in, watching with gentle eyes the father and the child seated in such a loving pose. It was one of those bits of light and shade an artist would like to have placed upon his canvas. The sun streaming full upon the old pale-faced man, and the light falling, subdued and broken, through the leafy network, on the graceful figure seated at his feet, while the man, leaning on the porch, was half in shadow, half in glowing light, the old Hall forming the background, and the avenue of trees the broken foreground.

Blakeborough looked at that picture of still life with longing, almost tearful eyes, yet with a touch of jealousy, wishing to stand as *he* did at that sunlit porch, and take a part in such a loving and serene repose. But he felt his presence fall like a shadow on it, blighting that

holy peace, and clouding all the summer light that made it look so calm and exquisite. It was through his act the descending stroke had fallen to startle the old man in his dreamy life, and chill her heart whose peace he valued beyond his own or all the world's, which yet he was about to scatter with a reckless and improvident disregard. He could not face the evil he knew must come, he should curse himself and the destroying influence of his past life, which still came flitting between his present hope and future promise. Upton was the embodiment of that past, conjured, like a demon, up, to stand for ever between him and hope, and like a dark, impenetrable veil, shutting him from good men's eyes.

He left Pritchard to walk up the avenue—watched him from behind a tree at the far end, and saw him welcomed like a loving friend. He did not even dare to show himself, fearing they should startle at his ill-omened face, and read the coming evil in his look; but ran away, thinking to forget all he had so lately seen, and trying to shut the vision out of such a fading and unstable peace. It would pass away quickly enough he knew. A word would scatter it, and the curse called down on the destroyer of that

peace would light on him, for it was through him it came.

He ran on still, and through the wooded glade went wildly onwards, calling Heaven's vengeance down on Upton. He had no fear of Dick Coombs now, nor of creeping feet stealing stealthily between the shadows of the trees, or the murderous hand placed on the trigger of the well-poised tube to maim and slaughter him. He had no fear now of death nor pain, and when he saw the bullet wedged into the aspen stem, wished it buried in his heart, and he relieved of all his troubles, and the racking pain which almost drove him mad.

But Dick Coombs *had* watched him, and there, within the hollow of a tree, had covered him with the deadly barrel of his gun; but Blakeborough's motion was too hurried, and his quick pace, darting along the winding wooded path, had made his aim uncertain; he did not want to miss again, so through that glen Blakeborough still went on, preserved from the lurking vengeance of the half crazy and revengeful Coombs.

He climbed the garden fences, and tramping through the flowers, came at last to the fallen oak, and from amidst its leafy boughs stood looking at the riven trunk. If with its fall his house fell

too, let it fall now! he was the only living man of his long line—his ancient race had dwindled to a span, and if the fairy creed were true, why did the flashing bolt not come and strike him too! He could not fly from it, and would not if he could.

And as he stood looking upon the tree, dreaming again through all his childhood's dream, his busy fancy called the silvery voices up his mother had taught him to believe in, and coming through the drooping foliage of that torn, mystic oak, he thought he heard a chirping voice come stealing from its leaves, and whisper low and softly, "Wait!"

END OF VOL. II.

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